

**THE LITTLE
POOR MAN**

("Il Poverello")



The LIFE DRAMA
OF
SAINT FRANCIS
OF ASSISI

—
HARRY LEE



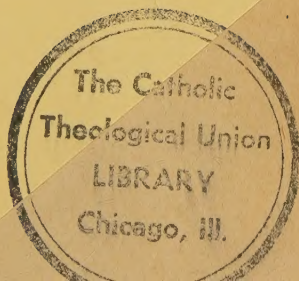
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THE LITTLE POOR MAN

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THE LITTLE POOR MAN

("IL POVERELLO")

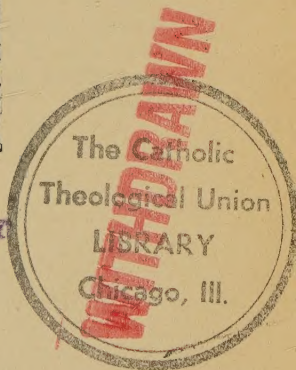
THE LIFE-DRAMA OF
SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI

PLAY IN FOUR ACTS

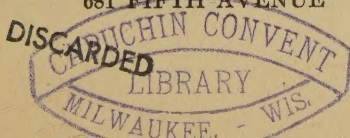
BY
HARRY LEE



10444



NEW YORK
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681 FIFTH AVENUE



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THE LITTLE POOR MAN

87-461

Province of St. Joseph
Capuchin-Franciscan Lib.
Mt. Calvary, Wisconsin,

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

FRANCIS: Wild and gay reveller. Eloquent face, dark eyes. Soft, sonorous voice. Of irresistible magnetism. Dreaming always of glorious adventure.

CLARE: Daughter of the noble Scifi Family. Frail, ardent, of dauntless courage.

BERNADONE: Father of Francis. Wealthy cloth-merchant. Domineering, irascible. Secretly proud of his son's dissipations and noble companions.

PICA: Mother of Francis. Of gentle birth. Aghast, yet in spite of all scandalous rumours, keeping her faith in him.

GUIDO: Little hunchback apprentice who adores Francis.

OLD HERMIT: Quaint Brother who lives on the hill-top.

BISHOP UCOLINO: White-haired, distinguished in his violet robes.

ZITA: A gypsy-girl of dark beauty and fascinations. Queen of a roving Troubadour-band.

PIETRO: The tavern-keeper.

DOMINIC: The wine-vender.

DIABOLO: A brigand.

THE THREE COMPANIONS:

RUFFINO: Brother of Clare, dashing follower of Francis.

ANGELO: Shy, simple-hearted in his admiration.

ELIAS: Rich young noble, jealous of Francis.

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

OTHER LITTLE BROTHERS:

LEO

ANGLEO

PACIFICO

MASSEO

LAZARUS

JUNIPER

TWO NEW CONVERTS

TWO OTHER BRIGANDS

THE TAVERN-MAID

THE WOLF OF GUBBIO

OLD-WIVES; STREET-CHILDREN; POPULACE
and TROUBADOURS

SCENES

ACT ONE

SCENE 1—The Square of Assisi (Morning)

SCENE 2—The Square of Assisi (Evening)

ACT TWO

SCENE 1—The Hermitage

SCENE 2—The Square of Assisi

ACT THREE

SCENE 1—The Hermitage

ACT FOUR

SCENE 1—A Forest Hut

SCENE 2—The Hermitage

ACT I

SCENE I

The Square of Assisi

CENTRE-BACK: Scifi palace. Pink-stone façade, slit windows with grills; pointed arches, gargoyles projecting. Above door a carved balcony, set on consoles of sculptured acanthus leaves.

REAR-LEFT (across corner): Old Romanesque church. Fan-shaped steps leading up to portico. Four fluted columns. Quaint out-door pulpit against nearest column. Bell-tower with little green bells.

LEFT: House of Bernadone. (Above) Flower-pots set in rings beneath windows. (Below) Arcade shop with rich fabrics exposed. Connecting church and shop an arched bridge, showing vista of street-alley, between dark, bristling walls.

REAR-RIGHT (extreme corner): Cobbled stairway-street visible.

RIGHT: Tavern-front with signs: '*Albergo*,' '*Spaccio di vino*' painted on wall. Small tables and chairs under open arcade.

FOREGROUND: Ancient fountain. Griffins' heads, spouting water from four sides into basin.

Early morning. Square sleepy, deserted, signs of awakening life. Windows

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

opened, cloths shaken. Enter maid from tavern. Clears away débris of night-before revelry, bottles, confetti, etc. Enter GUIDO, the hunchback apprentice of BERNADONE, from the shop, yawning. He opens shutters, sets out brilliant fabrics, etc.

MAID [singing amid clatter of dishes, bottles].

GUIDO.

Good morrow, maid!

MAID.

Good morrow!

[Sings again.

GUIDO.

Which art thou, maid or lark?

MAID.

Which am I——

GUIDO.

Lark, methinks, lacking but wings.

MAID.

And prithee—why?

GUIDO.

*Who but brown mistress lark
So gayly sings!*

MAID.

*An I a lark,
Then art thou, sir, an owl.*

ACT I—SCENE I

GUIDO.

*An owl——
I thank thee much,
The owl is wise.*

MAID.

*Preen not thy feathers, owl,
Lest wisdom lie
With fools.*

GUIDO.

With fools——

MAID.

*With fools, I say,
Prowling o' nights
And sleeping i' the day.*

GUIDO.

*Who sleeps by day then,
Who? I vow not I——*

MAID.

*Is he awake
Who rubs his drowsy eyes,
Heaves sigh on sigh,
Stretches his arms thus,
Yawning—‘Oh—hum—ho!’
Fie on thee, Guido, fie!*

[GUIDO yawns again; and the maid,
unable to resist, does the same.]

GUIDO.

*Hold, mistress,
Thou—thou too?*

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

MAID [mimicking him].

'Thou-too—thou-too!'

E'en as I said,

Thou art a blinking owl,

Turning thy tousled head

With meek 'thou-too—thou-too!'

GUIDO.

Song best becomes the lark.

MAID.

Before I sing, I say,

As I have said before,

Sleep nights and sing by day.

[Maid brings basket of linen to
the fountain and begins to scrub
lustily.]

GUIDO [hobbling toward her].

Sleep, woman—sleep!

Much dost thou know of sleep.

MAID.

Of sleep——

So should I, sir,

And so I do.

GUIDO.

Thou hast one master,

I, alas, have two.

MAID.

And thou dost grudge me mine,

That thou have three?

ACT I—SCENE I

GUIDO.

*Three——
God forbid!
With two
I am a madman!
One sleeps o' nights
Which is the lawful way,
But when sleep's through
He wakes—a demon.*

MAID.

That master's Bernadone.

GUIDO.

*And the other one,
The one who sleeps by day——*

MAID.

*Old Bernadone's son,
Mad Francis——*

GUIDO.

*Bernadone's shop to tend by day,
Bernadone's son to serve by night.
Sleep——
In Assisi!
Sleep's put to flight,
Night's blessed hours are gone.
The troubadours carouse
And weary not,
So strong they are,
So young,
From dusk to dawn.*

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

MAID [resting her linen on the edge of the fountain].

*And was She here last night,
Zita, the Romany,
The brazen wench?*

GUIDO.

*Zita, the Romany——
Where'er my noble master Francis
goes,
The lovely gypsy girl
On twinkling toes
Comes tripping after,
Madly,
Merrily——*

MAID.

The Jezebel—whence came she?

GUIDO.

*Who can tell!
Elusive,
Shadowy,
An airy sprite,
An unreality.*

MAID.

A witch——

GUIDO.

*Mayhap,
But oh,
To see her dancing
In the fire-glow——*

ACT I—SCENE I

*A spangled, swirling thing,
With smouldering eyes,
Blown hair too dark for shadows,
Lifted head,
Throat, wrists and ankles,
Rudely braceleted
With jangling golden things.
To see her smite with mimic rage
Her tambourine,
To hear it crash
As though a frail Venetian vase
Were shattered in a thousand bits
And then,
Swift as the lightning's flash
Made whole again.*

MAID.

*The owl, methinks,
Would turn the troubadour
And steal his master's love
For paramour——*

GUIDO.

*Why not?
For Guido is so good to see,
So straight, so tall,
Who would not turn from Francis
At his call!*

MAID.

*Forgive me, if I hurt thee—sir,
I meant no wrong.*

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

GUIDO.

*Hurt me—oh, nay,
I am beyond the hurt,
I've been myself too long,
Speak not of that.*

MAID.

*Speak thou then—tell me,
And I'll hold my tongue,
Tell of this Zita
And her lawless loves.*

GUIDO.

*Well—where thou standest
Was the Court of Love,
And there last night
They crowned her queen,
Twining red roses in her tangled hair
While all Assisi thronged to see.*

MAID.

*The shameless trull,
She should be flogged instead!*

GUIDO.

*My master, Signore Francis
Played the clown,
Tossed golden balls
And juggled them in air,
Snatched the guitar from gentle
Angelo,
Whirled in the tarantella with his
queen,*

ACT I—SCENE I

*Whilst grim Elias eyed him
Jealously.
A thousand times and more
My master drank her health——*

MAID.

*Wasting good wine upon a hag like
her!*

GUIDO.

*At dawn I led him to his chamber
there,
Closing the shutters 'gainst the break-
ing day.
And then 'twas time
To tend his father's shop.
Sleep——
Talk not to me of sleep!*

MAID.

*I' very truth, poor wight,
I pity thee.*

GUIDO.

Pity me not but rather envy me.

MAID.

Envy thee—why?

GUIDO.

Because of him I serve.

MAID.

Because of Francis?

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

GUIDO.

*If thou outlivest me,
Write on my grave:
"Here rests in peace the owl,
Francesco's willing slave."*

[Bells in the tower begin to ring. Old sacristan opens church-door. Beggars hobble on and take position on church-steps. LANDLORD PIETRO appears in tavern door, corpulent, arms akimbo. MONNA PICA passes on way to mass. GUIDO and the maid, presto at work again.]

GUIDO.

Madonna—

PICA [in passing].

*See that the shop is set in best array,
For long ere this thy master's caravan
Is homeward bound from France,
And any day or hour
He may come.*

[MONNA PICA passes on into the church. Cart lumbers out of alley, drawn by long-horned ox; market-women in gay bodices and kerchiefs perched on the straw; baskets piled high with green vegetables. Ox stops to drink at the fountain, women arrange wares around it. Driver follows PICA under church-curtain. A donkey with wine-casks ambles down the stair-street, stops before

ACT I—SCENE I

tavern. DOMINIC, the wine-
vender, unloads casks, helped by
PIETRO, the tavern-keeper.

DOMINIC.

How much today?

PIETRO.

*All, all thou hast—and more!
Good luck is mine, my friend, good
luck,
The troubadours have come!
Ah—they are customers,
My rarest wines they buy,
Wines crimson, amber, white.
If they upset my tables,
Break my wares,
What matter is 't, good Dominic,
They pay!*

DOMINIC.

*Their leader still, I wager,
Is Bernadone's boy?*

PIETRO.

*Ay, truly,
Madcap Francis,
Who but he!
His father pays and gladly for his
pranks,
As I retell them his great body quakes
With wheezy laughter.
So that his son hobnobs with royalty,
The old knave is content—and pays,*

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

*That is the best of all, good Dominic,
He pays——*

DOMINIC.

*Tonight I'll view the revels,
If thou'st need,
I'll bring thee more,
Till then——*

[DOMINIC waves hand and goes up
the steep stair-street. MONNA
PICA comes out of mass, stops to
bargain with old-wives, gossip,
filling her basket.

1ST OLD-WIFE.

*Pardon, Madonna, but——
Good Messer Bernadone,
Does he soon return?*

PICA.

*Ay, soon——
Why wouldst thou know?*

1ST OLD-WIFE.

*Well then, Madonna——
An thou wilt——
When he's at home
Madonna buys—ah, very much,
Baskets heaped so!
When he's away,
And Signore Francis too——*

2ND OLD-WIFE [sighing deeply, shaking her
head].

Ah—Signor' Francis!

ACT I—SCENE I

OTHER OLD-WIVES.

Ah——

PICA.

Why sigh ye so, good wives?

1ST OLD-WIFE.

Madonna is so brave!

2ND OLD-WIFE.

So brave——

1ST OLD-WIFE.

*Only sweet Mother Mary
And the Saints
And her Confessor share
The load of sorrow
That her soul must bear.*

PICA [aghast, dropping choice cauliflower].

Sorrow—what sorrow?

Pray ye tell——

1ST OLD-WIFE [slyly substituting an inferior cauliflower].

What all Assisi knows!

2ND OLD-WIFE.

Knows all too well!

PICA.

Knows—what?

1ST OLD-WIFE.

Knows that thy son's thy sorrow.

PICA [drawing herself up proudly].

My son—my sorrow?

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

OLD-WIVES.

Ah——

PICA.

My son—my sorrow!

Then let sorrow be my heritage

Through all eternity.

My son—my sorrow!

Ah, poor silly crones,

Gossiping, haggling always,

Let your groans be rather for your-
selves

And not for one who gives the world

So glorious a son.

Youth is like wine to him,

Love is a flame——

1ST OLD-WIFE.

He loveth wine,

But who doth not?

2ND OLD-WIFE.

And women too——

[All the Old-Wives cackle hoarsely,
PICA paying no heed to them.]

PICA.

He is a wild, unbroken colt,

The years will tame——

1ST OLD-WIFE.

Ay, tame!

Time tames them all,

My goodman was a devil in his day.

ACT I—SCENE I

PICA.

*Why tell ye of the Something here
That sings——*

[Pressing her hand to her heart].

*‘Some day thy son shall be
Adored by all the world,’
But that doth comfort me.*

[As MONNA PICA turns away, leaving her basket, the Old-Wives hide their amusement. When she disappears, they laugh croakingly.]

1ST OLD-WIFE.

*Adored by all the world!
Ho-ho—he-he!*

2ND OLD-WIFE.

*Go ask Prince Sciffi
Whether he adores old Pica’s son!*

1ST OLD-WIFE.

*Last night they say ’twas shameful,
Young Sciffi, Don Ruffino—drunk,
Was nearly ta’en by the watch to jail,
All on account o’ Francis!*

2ND OLD-WIFE.

*Ruffino’s little Sister Clare
Cried all night long—she did, poor
child,
Her maid ’twas, told me so,
Cried out her pretty eyes a’most,
All on account of Francis!*

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

1ST OLD-WIFE.

*Poor little thing,
Poor, sweet young thing!
Sh-h—there she goes now,
On her way to mass——*

[As CLARE appears in the palace doorway, shutters of BERNADONE'S house are thrown open. FRANCIS' head appears above the flower-pots, young, eager, glowing. Laughs down at the old-wives below. Spies CLARE suddenly. Breaks off flower, flings it to her feet. Startled, she looks up.

FRANCIS.

Madonna Clare——

[She lifts her head haughtily, passes up the steps. Gives alms to beggar, disappears under portico. FRANCIS still leaning on sill, frowning.

*I see—she blames me
For her brother's plight.
Ruffino needs no guide,
Why yesternight
He led us all!
Bah—need I care,
In Umbria
Are other maids more fair.
And yet—her trust
Lies like a trampled lily
In the dust.*

ACT I—SCENE I

[Sudden sound of children's laughter in the distance. Down the stair-street a gay band comes tumbling; fantastic attire, dancing. They see FRANCIS, wave. Crowd under his window, pelt him with flowers.

CHILDREN.

Come down to us——

Come down, dear Francis,

Come and play——

FRANCIS.

Wait, little comrades, wait,

A moment only!

Wait——

[FRANCIS rushes out pell mell. PICA is seen in doorway, vainly striving to hold him back, to drive the children away, half-scolding. But off they all fly, FRANCIS leading the farandole, gayest, maddest child of all. Sudden idea comes to him. Swings child on ox-cart, another, a third. All pile on, wild shrieks of laughter, cracking of whip. Off they go, disappearing down alley. Out rushes the driver from mass, starts in pursuit. Innkeeper puffing behind. Market-women, baskets upset, shaking fat fists, join in the chase. MONNA PICA, cap awry, stands disconsolate. All at once BERNADONE on horseback rides down the stair-street, saddlebags bulg-

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

ing. PICA and GUIDO run to meet him, assist in dismounting, unpacking bags. GUIDO limps off with horse. BERNADONE looks around.

BERNADONE.

*The shop is empty,
Where's that worthless boy?*

PICA [nervously].

*My love—he's gone
Beyond the Porta Nuova
To the hills,
To visit there a friend of his,
A prince,
And tell the noble ladies
Of thy swift return
With fabrics bought in France,
Stuffs rich and rare.*

BERNADONE [mollified].

*Ah—good,
My son one day shall be
Himself a mighty prince.*

PICA.

Adored by all the world!

BERNADONE.

A prince of high degree!

[In the midst of grand display
FRANCIS returns, gay, breathless.

FRANCIS.

Father—my welcome!

ACT I—SCENE I

BERNADONE [returning embrace].

*And was thy visit to the hills
A fruitful one?*

[Not waiting for FRANCIS' answer,
PICA prompts his reply. Panto-
mime behind old merchant's
back.

PICA.

*And didst thou tell them,
As I bade thee, son,
Of all the tapestries,
The cloth of gold,
The shimmering shawls,
The skeins of cobweb lace,
Is this not lovely—see!
And this—and this?*

FRANCIS [falling into exaggerated ecstasies].
Most wonderful—most rare!

BERNADONE.

This veil from Normandy——

FRANCIS.

A film of woven moonlight!

BERNADONE.

*How would it look on Lady Clara's
hair?*

*Show it her when she comes.
The Sciffi are a noble family,
Make them thy debtors.
An Clare admire it,
Well—we shall see.*

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

[FRANCIS is interrupted by beggar,
pulling at his sleeve from side.

FRANCIS.

Begone, thou vagabond!

BEGGAR [whining].

Only a penny, for the love of God!

FRANCIS.

Begone, I tell thee—dog!

[As beggar, disappointed, hobbles
away, suddenly FRANCIS feels re-
morse. Overtaking him at
church-steps, tosses coin into his
hat.

FRANCIS.

Even the dogs—

[Lifting the heavy church-curtain,
peering under it. Sees CLARE
still in prayer. Gazing within,
half furtively.

Still does she pray!

[To GUIDO who has limped after
him].

*Sinless—and prays,
And I—pray not——
Mayhap for me her prayers
To God are given,
Having forgotten the wrong I did.
An it be so,
My sins are surely shriven.*

ACT I—SCENE I

[Sudden thought comes to FRANCIS.
Shrugs his shoulders, lifts finger
toward GUIDO, then turns to
beggar.

*Beggar—thy cloak,
Thy hat!
Here, quick—take mine!
Hide thee behind the column,
Quick—I say!*

[Rapid exchange. FRANCIS, disguised, crouches on steps, hand out. Real beggar peers around column, leering. GUIDO, shaking head, returns to shop. Old couple, still busily occupied, turn around suddenly.

BERNADONE.

*This gold brocade now, Francis——
By all the saints and is he gone again!
Where can he be—the knave!
Madonna Pica, 'twere well that thou
shouldst go
Again to San Ruffino,
Have him re-christened 'Will'
'Will-o-the-wisp',
Saint Joseph—what a son!*

[During this the old couple, still
fussily searching, disappear with-
in shop. CLARE comes tripping
out. Disguised beggar, huddled
on steps, whining.

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

FRANCIS.

*A penny, lady,
For a starving one!*

CLARE [hesitatingly].

*I gave thee alms only a moment since,
And dost thou ask again?
Ah, nay—it must have been
To yonder blind man.
Here, poor fellow—here——*

[Smiling down into the beggar's
face, puts coin into his hand.
Sudden eloquent look makes her
start.]

FRANCIS.

*'Poor fellow'——
Oh, the pity in thy voice,
The melody——
It makes my soul rejoice.
So do the ring-doves call,
Veiled in the leaves,
At windy even-fall——*

CLARE.

Who art thou?

FRANCIS.

*Thine eyes——
What need that night should sigh
For heaven's stars,
Fair maid, an thou go by?
And yet I see
In that low voice, those eyes,
But scorn for me.*

ACT I—SCENE I

CLARE [trying to draw her sleeve from the beggar's grasp].

Thou art——

FRANCIS [with bitterness].

*Only a beggar,
One who meekly pleads forgiveness,
Though for thy brother's deeds
All blame be mine,
The greater so
Will be thy pardon.*

CLARE [wrenching her sleeve away as the beggar's lips press it].

Thou——

*An I never knew I hated thee,
I know it now.
Thou mountebank, I loathe thee,
Let me go!*

FRANCIS.

*Ah, Lady Clara,
An thou didst but know
The soul of Francis——*

CLARE.

*Thy soul's not mine,
Why should I know it?
Let me go—I say.*

FRANCIS.

*I am a beggar now indeed,
Go on thy way——*

[As she flees away, palace door closing behind her, the real beggar comes hobbling back.]

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

BEGGAR [preening himself].

*Good master,
My old dame Maria waits,
Under the hill, beyond the city gates.
I must begone——
She'll like me dressed like this,
She will, I know—my good Maria,
She will love me so.
Thou'rt young
And needest not such finery,
I'm old,
Thy plumes become a bird like me.*

FRANCIS [tearing off the rags, snatching his own cloak and hat].

*Nay, take thy rags!
Nor needst thou sigh for plumed
things,
In beggar's rags, thou'rt happier far
Than I——*

[As beggar goes hobbling off, jingling his coins, FRANCIS returns slowly to father's shop. Begins to turn over stuffs with a weary air. GUIDO, with a rude broom, sweeps before the door of the shop.]

FRANCIS.

*Among these gaudy things,
Scissors and rule in hand,
How long—ah, me,
How long——*

ACT I—SCENE I

GUIDO.

Thou'rt sad, my master?

FRANCIS.

*Sad—sad indeed,
A prisoner in chains——*

GUIDO.

*My master—meant by heaven
To be a cavalier!
Woe's me,
I understand.*

FRANCIS.

*Ah, Guido, simple Guido,
Thou art wise.*

GUIDO.

*Wise, master——?
None but thyself hath eyes to see
Aught but a halting fool,
A clod—in me.*

FRANCIS.

*And canst thou see me, Guido,
Upon a snow-white steed?*

GUIDO.

*I see thee
All in shining mail,
A cavalier indeed!*

FRANCIS.

*With lance and shield
And floating plume,
Ah, merrily I'd go*

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

*'All through the fair blue weather,
All through the rain and snow,
The winds to be my brothers,
A star to be my guide——*

GUIDO.

*And I like Little-John, my lord,
A-jogging by thy side!*

[The square is empty now. Shafts of sunbeams dance over the fountain. FRANCIS drops fabrics, comes slowly forward. GUIDO hobbling by him.]

FRANCIS.

*See yonder sunbeams, Guido,
Like golden butterflies——
Would I might touch their loveliness,
Ah, no—it dims—it dies——
And that is life,
A shadow on the floor,
A rose that blooms and fades
And is no more.
Dear Guido—dreams,
We shall awake ere long.*

GUIDO.

*E'en if we do, dear master,
Dreams are good.*

FRANCIS.

*Good while they last,
But afterward——*

ACT I—SCENE I

GUIDO.

*My master, what is't ails thee,
Thou wast not ever so?
To hear thee, one might think
Thou wast a greybeard
Trembling at the brink.*

FRANCIS.

*Though not in years, dear Guido,
I—am—old.*

GUIDO.

*Old—hear thee!
Thou art young,
Young, young, my master,
Young——
And not like me,
Misshapen, dwarfed, ill-born,
I who claim kinship as I rove the
wood
With every twisted, lightning-blasted
tree.
Life would be bitter, master,
Were it not for thee.
But life to thee's a cup scarce touched,
A crimson, brimming cup
Thy life is.
Drink——*

FRANCIS.

*The cup of life and love,
Tonight—the Romany!*

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

GUIDO.

*Zita tonight,
The lovely Romany!*

FRANCIS [dreamily].

*Strange how my mother's words
Come back to me——*

GUIDO.

*Why should they not?
So oft she says:
'My son, one day thou'lt be
Adored by all the world'!*

FRANCIS.

*They haunt me, Guido,
Haunt me——famish me——*

[FRANCIS is seated on the edge of the fountain. GUIDO tailor-wise at his feet, hands clasped over knees. He speaks with awe.]

GUIDO.

*I think thy mother's words are——
prophecy!*

[They are silent in the midst of the flickering sunbeams.]

CURTAIN

SCENE II

The Square of Assisi

Night coming on. *Benedictus* bells ringing as curtain goes up. Lights twinkle out from houses. Shop of BERNADONE

ACT I—SCENE II

closed, old folks retired. Shadowy forms come out of church, disappear into alley. Moon rises slowly behind church-tower. All at once sounds of revelry in distance. Band of gay Troubadours come dancing, singing, playing stringed instruments down the stair-street. ZITA, the gypsy queen, in brilliant hues like a fluttering butterfly. Waving her wand, leading the dance. RUFFINO appears on the SCIFI balcony. Waves his hand, joins them. Shutters above flower-pots cautiously open. FRANCIS' head thrust out. He too waves. Blows a gay kiss to ZITA, half mocking. Drops from sill. Joyous company circles the fountain. Fantastic attire, wild merry-making. Singing and laughter. FRANCIS gayest, wildest of all. The irresistible magnet about which all turn. As instruments twang out the wild gypsy music, Court of Love is held in mock pantomime. FRANCIS crowned "king of the revels" with ZITA his queen. He commands her to dance. Troubadours in brilliant circle about fountain. ZITA before it, poised, graceful, swaying. Bare arms curved to the tambourine. She curtsies low before the king.

FRANCIS.

Now all ye harpers,

Harp——

All ye mad pipers,

Play——

The dusky queen of Romany

Doth hold—high holiday!

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

[She begins to dance slowly, languorously, her dark head tilted. A movement floating, sensuous, dreamy. Suddenly faster, she whirls on her toes, leaping, twisting, stamping her foot, twirling the tambourine. Her slender form like a disk revolving. As the dance ends, all applaud rapturously. Suddenly voices call from the tavern. All rush inside except FRANCIS. ZITA still poised there, flushed, panting.]

ZITA [on tiptoe, gliding nearer].
Hail, king of Love,
All hail!
Behold—thy queen,
Zita, the Romany,
In forest-green,
Red haws of roses
For her gypsy-crown,
Her kirtle spun
Of autumn's gold and brown.

FRANCIS.
Thou sorceress——
Of what dark magic
Hast thou found the charm?

ZITA.
Dark magic——
Nay, I love thee,
Can love—harm?

ACT I—SCENE II

FRANCIS.

Love——

[With sudden swift, sinuous movement she poises beside him as he sits, half-averted on the edge of the fountain. Bends over his shoulder.

ZITA.

*Ay—let me teach thee love,
Let Zita free
The sleeping lion
In the soul of thee.*

FRANCIS.

*The lion—ah,
The lion never sleeps.*

ZITA.

*My breath would blow to flame,
The flickering spark,
Vex the calm sea to storm,
Make day—of dark.
What know these pulseless dolts,
Who work and eat and sleep,
Of love——
And thou wert mine I'd worship thee,
I'd weep for very joy
To know thee mine.
Ah, I adore thee—Francis!*

FRANCIS.

*Being thine,
What of the years?*

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

*Youth gone—desire dead,
What should love feed upon?*

ZITA [with scorn].

*Thou'rt like a cowed monk,
Who backward peers,
Lest the dead past pursue
Tomorrow too—all fears.*

[Takes a dancing step or two from him, then returns softly.

*Love hath no past, no future,
Love is now, is—here.
I—I am love, oh, king of mine,
And thou——
Am I not lovely, love?
Is not my breast
A refuge sweet,
Where love in peace might rest,
My hair for canopy?
Like little moths my hands
That flutter near the flame.*

FRANCIS.

*Ah—Romany,
From what enchanted lands——*

ZITA.

*Now——
Now at last I know
Youth's royal blood
Is surging through thy veins
A crimson flood.*

ACT I—SCENE II

*Now dost begin to sense
What life might be,
Lost in the moonlit hills
Of Umbria—with—me.*

FRANCIS.

Lost in the hills——

ZITA.

*Ay—lost,
Lost as the lonely streams
That seek the sea,
Thou lost in me—dear love,
I—lost in—thee!*

FRANCIS.

*Wouldst thou adore me
Always—to the end?*

ZITA.

*Seek in my lips the answer,
Let them lend
Their honeyed treasure,
For oh—thou shalt repay the loan a
thousandfold
In love's long day!*

[Troubadours come rioting out of the Inn again, surrounding the two, summoning the royal pair to the banquet. King and queen of the feast lead the way, dancing, whirling about square. Troubadours, two by two, whirling after. Gayer and wilder the gypsy music. All at once watch-

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

man passes with torch, hobbling hurriedly down the stair-street. Heads pop out of windows in nightcaps. All hide till he vanishes into the alley. Then riot again. Surround the tables in tavern-arcade as old inn-keeper appears in the doorway, bowing and scraping. Bearing aloft huge dish of capon, followed by servants with steaming accessories.

FRANCIS [as host].

*Mark—oh, my friends,
A man you all know well,
Good Messer Pietro,
Master of the Inn!
To make mouths glad with good things
Is his gentle art.
He comes and meekly—hand on heart,
Low-bending as you see,
To serve us with the feast.*

TROUBADOURS [wildly applauding].

Bravo—Great Pietro!

RUFFINO [mocking].

*Why dost thou speak, oh, king,
Of one so rare as—Messer Pietro?
Don Pietro—rather say,
Prince of fair pastry
Lord of the turning-spit,
Duke o' most musty ales,
The great god Bacchus*

ACT I—SCENE II

*Come to dwell with men!
Behold his bulging front,
His ruddy cheeks, his jowls.
Doth not his every part
Bespeak him master
Of the royal art?*

[The inn-keeper, greatly embarrassed, keeps on bowing, as his gay guests begin on the viands with gusto.]

ZITA [at the table beside FRANCIS].
A cheer for—little Pietro!

[Led by her, all cheer him loudly.
She beckons.]

*Don Pietro—here!
Thy queen commands!*
[As the inn-keeper hesitates].
*Now—on thy knees!
Now lift thy bald pate—so!
Now purse thy lips!
Art ready——?*

[PIETRO obeying, greatly perturbed, ZITA kisses him suddenly. Then, while all shout with laughter, he bows himself backward, stumbling, falling. Scrambles to his feet, disappears within tavern. Amidst wild merriment FRANCIS, with glass raised, springs to his feet.]

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

FRANCIS.

Ladies——

Lords——

Pray feast ye merrily!

We've youth—health—appetite,

Most welcome are you all!

Let us be blithe tonight,

Who knows but this may be

Our last——

[Flinging his head back, quaffing the wine to the last drop. As he sinks in his chair beside the gypsy, she fills the glass up again.]

ZITA [mocking].

Our last——?

Grey Friar Francis,

Thou art over gay

For one so—old!

FRANCIS.

Nay, I but jested.

Eat,

Drink,

Be merry——

[Carousing grows madder. Suddenly the whole troupe, led by DON RUFFINO and gypsy, rush noisily out and up the stair-street. Noise grows distant. FRANCIS, left alone in half-drunken stupour, rouses himself. Looks dully about.]

ACT I—SCENE II

FRANCIS.

Zita—where art thou?

Ruffino!

Angelo!

What—gone?

All, all—gone,

And I—alone!

GUIDO [*limps out of the shadows, touches FRANCIS' shoulder*].

My master, come—tarry not here!

FRANCIS [*bitterly*].

The feast is ended now,

The lights burn low.

'Tis Bernadone's gold they love,

Not Francis, nay—not he.

GUIDO.

Ah, master—come!

FRANCIS.

And what of Francis,

Does he care for them?

GUIDO.

They are not worthy of thee.

FRANCIS [*harshly*].

Flatter me not!

GUIDO.

Ah, master——

FRANCIS.

Yonder a dim light burns

Where virgin Clara sleeps—ah,

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

*All beauty taunts me, Guido,
All happiness,
Almost within my grasp—it vanishes
And leaves me thus alone,
Alone—alone——*

[Noise comes nearer. Companions
rush back singing, laughing.
Swoop down on the lonely brood-
ing figure. GUIDO disappears in
the shadows.

RUFFINO [plucking FRANCIS' sleeve].
*What ails thee, King of Troubadours,
Was Pietro's wine too red?*

ZITA [with a mocking titter].
*He ponders on some kingdom still to
gain.
Here—take thy sceptre, king,
Arise—and reign!*

[Snatching up sceptre, she offers it
mockingly. FRANCIS angrily
turns his shoulder, casts it away.

ELIAS.
*Mayhap he wills,
To give more zest to life,
As other fools have done,
To take a wife.*

FRANCIS [with a strange smile].
Ay, truly said, Elias—so I do.

[They laugh uproariously.
I mean to take a wife,

ACT I—SCENE II

*More beauteous—more pure—more
true*

Than in your wildest dreams,

False friend,

Could come to you.

Ah—could ye see her,

As my soul can see,

Under the stars—somewhere

My Lady Poverty——

[Again bursts of laughter.]

ELIAS.

Come—leave him,

He is drunk,

Or mad!

ZITA [jeeringly].

When, Francis, may we see

This bride of thine,

This—Lady Poverty?

RUFFINO.

Come—leave the beggar!

[All rush noisily off, disappear.

FRANCIS is left alone in the moon-light. Palace is dark now. The flaring torch casts the shadow of FRANCIS on the wall, the gestures of his restless hands. GUIDO comes again from the shadows.

GUIDO.

Now they are gone,

Thou'lt come with me?

The morn is near.

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

FRANCIS.

*They called me madman—beggar—
fool!*

They—my good friends!

GUIDO.

They meant it not.

FRANCIS.

*Now friends, indeed, if never so
before,*

They speak me as I am,

They tear away the mask,

I am the fool.

GUIDO.

Nay, master, nay——

FRANCIS.

This motley cap!

[Flings it aside].

These trappings of the clown!

This sceptre!

How I hate them all——

And yet—they seemed a part of joy,

Seemed—and were not.

But tell me, Guido,

Am I less the fool,

Stripped of the fool's attire?

Still—still the fool,

The fool——

BERNADONE [calls gruffly from within the
house].

Guido—where art thou, knave?

ACT I—SCENE II

[Exit GUIDO as a shadow passes under the arch suddenly, approaching the fountain. A little hermit in cloak and cowl. Crosses himself before drinking. FRANCIS, raising his head with a start. Watches him.]

FRANCIS.

Ho—little brother!

HERMIT.

Peace be with thee, son.

FRANCIS [dashing his hand against the table].

Peace, peace—that empty word again,

There is no peace!

And yet, I pardon thee,

Thou meanst no ill.

'Tis late,

Thou art not young.

Hast far to go?

HERMIT.

The Hermitage, my son,

Up yonder—in the hills.

FRANCIS.

*That ruined shrine they call Saint
Damian?*

Methinks thou art none other

Than that holy man

The old wives marvel on,

Dwelling alone?

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

HERMIT.

*Nay—not alone, my son,
Joy dwells with me.*

FRANCIS [laughs aloud].

*Bah—words again—words, words!
Joy dwells with thee?
Joy—that thou canst not touch
Nor see——?*

HERMIT.

No man can take it from me.

FRANCIS [with a sneer].

When came this gracious guest?

HERMIT [fervently].

*When I had given all the world calls
joy,
The—Great Joy came.*

[FRANCIS, rising suddenly, comes toward him, flinging himself on the edge of the fountain. The hermit drinks again.]

FRANCIS.

*But didst thou too once love the garish
things
The crimson flowers——
Did wild desire
Consume thy body with delirious fire?*

HERMIT [starting].

*I—who was young—am old.
Old—I am young.*

ACT I—SCENE II

*My soul is a spring of sweet waters
Upsurging
Like songs to be sung.*

FRANCIS [dreamily].

*When thou hadst given—all,
The Great Joy came?*

HERMIT.

*What need I more than these?
For nights of storm—a thatch,
For pilgrimage—a cloak,
A crust—for food.
What need I more,
Or thou,
Or any man?*

FRANCIS.

A cloak—a crust——?

HERMIT [laying his arm on his shoulder].

*Dost deem me poor?
I am a miser, son,
With hoarded store of golden treasure.
Yet—I crave for more,
And each day more is given.*

FRANCIS.

Each day more—is given?

HERMIT.

*But now, I must begone.
Before I reach the Hermitage,*

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

*The larks will wake
And dawn——*

[Making the sign of the cross].

Peace be with thee!

FRANCIS [slowly].

And with—thee!

[As the little hermit turns away, starts up the stair-street, FRANCIS follows the shadow with his eyes. Half rises, then sinks back again, brooding. The moonlight falls aslant on the fountain, making a pathway of glittering light, against which the retreating shadow is visible. The rest of the square is in darkness. Door of BERNADONE's house opens stealthily. GUIDO hobbles toward FRANCIS, unnoticed by him.]

FRANCIS.

Would that I dared to follow!

GUIDO.

*Oh, whither, master,
Whither wouldst thou go?*

FRANCIS.

*An old grey hermit from the hills
Passed by——*

GUIDO.

And thou?

FRANCIS.

I too—would go.

ACT I—SCENE II

GUIDO.

*Wouldst follow him
And live in poverty?
What would thy father say?*

FRANCIS.

*My father—he would rage,
That I, by whom he meant to raise
The house of Bernadone
Should away——*

GUIDO.

Thy mother——

FRANCIS.

*Sweet mother—she would weep,
And yet she'd trust in God
And trust in me.*

GUIDO.

Madonna Clare——

FRANCIS.

*Ah—little would she care.
None, none would care
Except my mother—Guido.*

GUIDO [wistfully].

*Dogs sorrow for their masters,
I would grieve.*

FRANCIS.

Ay, truly, thou——

GUIDO.

*Ah, go not, master,
Thou wouldst be a beggar,*

*Thou the cavalier,
The Troubadour——?*

FRANCIS [sudden thought, eagerly].
*Ah, Guido! Thou hast given me
More than thou knowest!
Oh, wonder,
Wonder of it!
Why should not Francis be
Still——still the Troubadour?*

GUIDO.
*How shall the lark be other
Than the lark?*

FRANCIS.
*A Troubadour of God.
A little Singing Brother!*

GUIDO.
*Singing o' love, my lord,
I know—I know!*

FRANCIS.
*Dost thou recall the song
That came to me
The night we walked beyond the gates
And heard the nightingale?
It was a hint, mayhap,
Of things to be.*

GUIDO [handing FRANCIS a lute left behind
by the Troubadours].
*Dear Master,
Sing it me——
But do not go.*

ACT I—SCENE II

FRANCIS [touching strings softly, sings].

*I'm hoarding golden treasure
For days when I must wait,
A grey benighted pilgrim,
A beggar at the gate.*

*And when with sounding timbrel
And merry pipes atune
The masque of youth goes by me
A laggard in blue June,*

*I'll count my golden treasure,
And smile the while I wait,
A grey, benighted pilgrim,
A beggar at the gate.*

[His hands still resting on the strings, he takes a long look around. Then rises, reaches hands toward GUIDO.]

*Ah, Guido—go I must
Upon this new adventure!
Thou'lt tell my mother?
She will understand,
As always—she will trust.*

GUIDO.

*Were I as other men,
Thou shouldst not go alone,
An thou wouldst let me—I——*

FRANCIS.

*Would it might be,
But near or far my heart is thine.*

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

*The old grey hermit said,
When he had given all
The Great Joy came.
Shall it be mine?
I only know—I follow——
Fare thee well.*

[The crouched shadow is motion-
less, as the other goes up the
moonlit path.

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE I.

The Hermitage

PAINTED BACK-DROP: View off over low rocky parapet. Walls and towers of Assisi in the distance. Soft, rolling Umbrian hills. Olive-groves, cypresses, vineyards, etc. Italian blue sky. View is framed either end by dark stone-pines, standing like sentinels, guarding the little sylvan retreat.

REAR-LEFT: Ruined Hermitage with tumbledown, vine-covered tower. Ancient bell-rope hanging outside. Broken door and rock-bench. Cypress to left. Between hut and cypress a leafy path running off into forest.

LEFT FOREGROUND: Old Byzantine crucifix close to cypress.

REAR-RIGHT (extreme angle): Between the stone-pine and a great branching oak-tree a narrow path winds up with steps cut in the rock.

RIGHT: Festoons of grape-vines, luxuriant-leaved, hanging between the oak and an olive-tree, form a little green bower, carpeted with wild-flowers growing.

RIGHT FOREGROUND: Picturesque rock-seat, near arbour. Stone back and sides covered with a mass of thorny red roses.

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

Early dawn. Rosy glow from the rising sun lights up the towers of Assisi in the distance. From rock-path old hermit advances, leaning on stick. Pauses for breath. As bells begin to chime (off stage) he crosses to foot of crucifix, kneels there. Suddenly FRANCIS appears, having evidently followed unobserved. Slim, ardent, leaping lightly down path. Stops also, looks about. Laughing glance at kneeling figure, flowers, birds in the branches. Enraptured by the view. Drops down on rock-seat by the roses. As bells stop ringing hermit rises.

FRANCIS.

Hail!

HERMIT [greatly startled, crosses himself, tottering; cracked voice].

Mother of God——

But thou didst frighten me!

FRANCIS.

A human voice?

HERMIT.

Last Easter, 'twas a year

Since one of mortal kind

Disturbed my solitude.

But thou art welcome, son,

God give thee peace.

FRANCIS.

Welcome, indeed——

Bestir thy wits a bit.

I came not without bidding.

ACT II—SCENE I

*Last night——
Hast thou forgot?
The lanthorn of the moon
Is but a feeble light
For aged eyes——
'Twas by the fountain.*

HERMIT.

*Ah—now I mind thee, son,
Thy voice I mind.
I stopped to drink.
Ah, yes, I mind thee now.
The pilgrimage was long,
Too long for one so old.
Somehow thy voice
Made me a moment young.*

[Comes nearer, peering into FRANCIS' face.

*And now I see thy face,
Methinks I'm young again.*

FRANCIS.

Wouldst have it true?

HERMIT.

*True——?
It is true, my son,
These hints of youth
That come to me
Are more than dreams—they're truth.*

FRANCIS.

And thou art young——

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

HERMIT.

*Youth is spirit,
Can the spirit age?*

FRANCIS [with a laugh].

*Then—young my brother,
Thou dost surely know
Youth's hunger!
I have trudged——
Thou knowest how far it is
From yonder town.
Be a good host,
I famish——
Even the foolish sparrows must be
fed.
Then for the love of God,
Bring wine and bread.*

HERMIT [tottering off to the hut].

*Thy pardon, son,
I'll fetch thee what I have.*

FRANCIS [musing].

*Odd little brother,
How it frightened him,
A human voice——
Companion of the trees,
The winds,
The rain——*

[Sudden glance about with a shudder.

I should be lonely here.

ACT II—SCENE I

HERMIT [hobbling from hut with basket].

*These crusts, my son,
I've begged from door to door.
This wine,
Kind Monna Pica gave.
I'd offer more if more were mine,
But all I have and welcome, son,
Is thine.*

[Sets them out on the stone. FRANCIS tries to eat, makes wry face. Pretends, throwing crumbs behind him secretly to the birds.

FRANCIS.

A royal feast!

HERMIT.

*Far better herbs with love,
The wise man says,
Than the stalled ox
And hate——*

FRANCIS.

*True, brother—true.
And is yon ivied wreck thy home?*

HERMIT [sadly].

*Ay, 'tis the ruin of Saint Damian.
In ancient days
'Twas glorious to see.
I've set myself about rebuilding it,
But I've begun too late.*

FRANCIS.

Nay—not too late.

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

HERMIT [with trembling voice].

*They cannot see it,
Rising like the sun,
I cannot make them love it.
I have done
All I can do—but pray and pray and
pray.
My pilgrimage, dear stranger, as I
live,
Brought only these——
These paltry coins.*

FRANCIS [taking fire at once, indignant].

In rich Assisi were there none to give?

HERMIT.

The poorest gave the most.

FRANCIS [hastily empties pockets as always].

Here, little brother—here!

HERMIT.

Thine all——?

FRANCIS [sudden impulse, throwing himself
tailorwise at old man's feet].

*If some young knave
Should offer thee to stay
And help rebuild it,
Wouldst thou tell him nay?*

HERMIT [gazing out strangely as if at vision].

*If I could see it rising
Stone by stone,
Sun-bathed 'gainst heaven's blue,*

ACT II—SCENE I

*Washed with the rain,
Wind-blown——
If I could know
Some day 'twould be
The house of God again!*

FRANCIS [impatiently].

*But answer me——
If some young good-for-naught
Should tarry here awhile,
Till from the belfry high
Across the hills,
Saint Damian's bells should cry
Far San Ruffino's answering,
Say—wouldst thou sigh,
Old Saint,
Or wouldst thou sing?*

HERMIT.

Thou art in jest——

FRANCIS [half bitterly, half gayly].

*Ay, let it be a jest,
The better so,
The days of toil,
Of penitence,
Will go——*

HERMIT [clasping his hands].

*May all the saints,
St. Matthew and St. Mark,
St. Peter and St. Paul,
St. Luke, St. John,*

*And all the rest,
Let blessings fall like rain,
Oh, son of mine,
Upon thy head.
The vigils I have kept,
The prayers I've said,
Are answered.
Hallelujah——
Let me go and say my beads.
See now—how straight I walk,
How firm I go——*

[OLD HERMIT, making pathetic and amusing efforts to walk like a youth, disappears into hut. FRANCIS scans the ruin, whistles little French song. All at once cuts a reed, begins to fashion it into a pipe.

FRANCIS.

*Why not play Pan,
And with my piping free
Some wan, imprisoned dryad
From a tree!*

[Begins to pipe. Bird-notes from the trees answer. Suddenly wild gypsy love-song (off stage), sound of laughter; then silence. He pipes again. ZITA comes tripping down the rock-path, brilliant-garbed, beautiful. As they gaze at one another, she makes a low mocking curtsy.

ACT II—SCENE I

FRANCIS.

Thou——

ZITA.

Thou——

FRANCIS.

How didst know to seek me here?

ZITA.

I heard thy piping.

FRANCIS [nervously].

Are thy comrades near?

ZITA.

Nay.

[She begins to dance slowly toward him, alluring, with sudden whirls on her toes; advancing, retreating, always stealthily nearer.]

*In the shadows
Of yon cypress-grove,
Beyond the Monte Pennino,
Is a lonely, lovely place.
The doves cry always there,
I will forgive thee, master,
If thou'lt with me—now.*

FRANCIS [half turned away, still pretending to pipe].

Forgive me—and for what?

ZITA [with last whirl, suddenly poised, hand on his shoulder].

*What knight before
E'er left in such a plight*

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

*His lady,
As thou me
But yesternight——?
Still I forgive,
Still does thy Romany
Offer her love.*

[Plucks a rose, offers it, sinking
down on stone by his side.]

*Like this red rose
To thee——*

FRANCIS [accepting with feigned solemnity].
*Thanks, gracious lady,
But thou must ask
Old Beppo to absolve me
From my task.
I am apprenticed unto him,
We mean to build again
Yon ruined chapel.*

ZITA [trills of laughter].
What here—like ghosts of men?

FRANCIS [tauntingly].
*Ay—hidden from the world,
Two Alpine flowers
Blooming in the snow,
High in the snow,
Where feet of man ne'er tread.*
[Pipes again, beginning to sing.
“Go sorrowing, poor maid,
Thy love is dead——!”]

ACT II—SCENE I

ZITA [leaping up, stamping her foot].

*Am I a fish-wife then,
A shrew—a hag,
That thou dost treat me so?*

FRANCIS [singing on, mocking].

*“Thy love is dead, poor maid,
In sorrow go——”*

ZITA.

*Is it that pallid Sciffi,
Is it Clare?*

FRANCIS.

That name must not be spoken.

ZITA.

Yet I dare——

[Sudden softness, trying her wiles
again.]

*Ah—nay,
I know, dear love,
Of all men thou the best
Doth love to act the clown,
To play the fool,
To jest——
But we are lost without thee.
The Troubadours are glum
As they were old grave-diggers.
Pity—come,
Come—be again our king,
Come, love—I pray!*

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

FRANCIS [with shrug of shoulder, shaking gypsy's hand off].

*Nay, lady,
Beppo has my word,
He is my friend,
I stay——*

ZITA.

*That old brown beggar!
Bah, come—let him die.
Away——*

FRANCIS.

Old Beppo has my promise.

ZITA [pleading, concealing her anger].

Francis——

FRANCIS.

Nay.

ZITA [sudden scorn].

*Ah, now I know
What keen, far-seeing eyes Elias had,
I see how very wise he and the others
were.*

They called thee mad—thou art.

And shall a madman

Wound young Zita's heart?

She offered thee her love,

Take now her hate.

Yet shalt thou feel its dagger-point.

Be patient,

Wait——

ACT II—SCENE I

[Wild peal of laughter, mocking kisses thrown. She runs up the rock-path, disappears. FRANCIS gazes after her whimsically. Shrugs shoulder, snaps finger, laughs. OLD HERMIT, unseen in doorway.]

FRANCIS.

*The dagger of her hate!
She plays at tragedy.
How beautiful she is,
Almost I—nay,
That was another Francis.*

[All at once spying the HERMIT.]

*Ah—hast thou heard?
I thought thee praying.
Hast seen the red-wing then,
The scarlet bird
That answered to my piping?*

HERMIT [sudden memories].

*Yes—I know,
I too was young,
God shrive me,
Long ago——*

FRANCIS [eagerly].

*And thou didst come,
As I came,
To be free?*

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

HERMIT.

*Free from the world,
Its pomp,
Its vanity.*

FRANCIS.

*But here—an anchorite
Within thy cave,
Art thou not still, God pity thee,
A slave?*

HERMIT.

*God's willing bondsmen
Go in golden chains,
Light as the winds of Spring,
As April rains.*

[Turning toward the ruined chapel
rapturously, reaching arms trem-
ulously toward it.

*Oh, holy task——
Saint Damian shall stand,
A cross within,
A taper either hand!*

[Turns to work feebly, FRANCIS
springs to his aid. Old man be-
gins ancient chant, FRANCIS join-
ing. All at once angry voices in
the distance. FRANCIS runs to
top of path, hurries back.
Feigned terror, mirth.

ACT II—SCENE I

FRANCIS.

*Heaven forfend!
My father——
Hear him rage!
He brings the neighbours too,
Pietro, the tavern-keeper,
Guido, the little page,
The poor wine-vender—Dominic!
Great Bernadone seeks his truant son.
An this be not adventure,
There is none.
But hide me, brother—hide me,
Quick, I say,
Lash thine old wits,
We're lost if we delay!*

HERMIT [greatly perturbed, turning this way
and that, stuttering].

*Cloak of St. Joseph hide thee!
Where—how—oh, oh——
The rock beyond the Crucifix!
Dost hear me—go!*

FRANCIS [flying off].

*Get to thy hut,
And if the braggarts come
To question thee,
Be deaf,
Be dumb——*

[Old man hobbles swiftly to hut,
vanishes also. At top of rock-
path BERNADONE appears, breath-

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

less, apoplectic from climb.
Puffing, raging, sinks to stone
seat. Followers behind.

DOMINIC [the wine-vender].

*We'll find him here, sir,
This dawning—on the road,
(as I have told thee)
When my little donkey's load
Of good red wine
Went jouncing—glug-glug-glug,
As down the steep we strode,
We met a youth like Francis.*

BERNADONE [furiously].

*Like Francis——
May the curse of God be on thee,
If it is not he!*

DOMINIC.

*Oh, it was Signore Francis,
Thou shalt see.*

PIETRO [the tavern-keeper].

*Good Messer Bernadone,
Yonder as we came,
I spied an old monk hobbling,
I'm sure—the same
That wanders through Assisi,
Begging bread.*

BERNADONE [as PIETRO hesitates].

*Go call him, scoundrel,
Dost hear me—go, I said.*

ACT II—SCENE I

[PIETRO tiptoes toward hut, knocks timidly on the door.]

BERNADONE [as he obeys].

Louder, knock louder—fool!

Guido,

Art thou a stone,

A tree?

Hast thou no eyes,

No legs,

No debt to me?

Rouse thee and search,

Or by the saints I'll crack

This staff in twain

Across thy crooked back.

[GUIDO begins search over wall, behind rocks, trees, etc.]

PIETRO [still knocking].

He makes no answer, master.

BERNADONE.

Away, white-livered lamb!

Back to thy bubbling kettles,

Back!—I'll ram

That crazy door,

I'll make the beggar hear!

[Waddling to hut, strikes door fiercely with staff. Again, again.]

Open——

'Tis Signore Bernadone!

PIETRO [tiptoes about, wringing his hands, horrified at what seems to him sacrilege].

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

*Sir—I fear
Thy violence may anger the good
priest.*

BERNADONE.

*Anger him—bah!
Of all my fears 'tis least.
Open, I say,
I warn thee——*

[Throwing weight of his body
against the old door, it gives
suddenly. He falls sprawling
half in the door, half out.
Scrambles like an unbalanced
beetle to his feet, panting.

Ha—'tis done!

[As old monk appears in the door-
way.

*Now, tell me, mummer,
Tell me——
Where's my son?*

[As OLD HERMIT gazes blankly
he bends, shouting in old man's
ear.

My son—where is he?

[HERMIT points to ears, lips, shak-
ing his head.

*He's dumb, by Michael's sword,
Or keeps some silly vow,
I'll search his hut.*

ACT II—SCENE I

[As old man permits him to pass, he enters. FRANCIS lifts head above rock, laughing. GUIDO sees him suddenly, reaches arms toward him. FRANCIS, finger to lips, sinks down again quickly. GUIDO nods, hand to heart; turns away as BERNADONE comes from hut in a fury.

BERNADONE.

*The knave's not there!
Guido, how now,
Hast marked each place
Where he might hide?
The villain—to disgrace
The house of Bernadone!*

GUIDO.

Ay, master—I have searched

BERNADONE.

*Dominic—thou vagabond!
Try not again to vend thy wines to me,
Henceforth I buy from old Mascarro.
A pretty trick thou'st played
To lead us here,
Thou—and the gypsy jade.
I'm done—I search no more,
I have no son.
Last night I swore I'd disinherit him.
His mother pled and wept,
Saying how in her heart
She'd always kept the faith
That he would be——*

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

*“Adored by all the world.”
Women—what dupes they are,
He’ll not dupe me.
Come—on with you, away!
He’ll beg forgiveness yet,
And on that day I’ll have my vengeance.
He who might have been a prince in
Italy!
The devil’s sent his curse on mine and
me.*

[BERNADONE waddles storming away, followed by PIETRO and DOMINIC. PIETRO, turning toward hut, crosses himself. GUIDO looking back, hand on heart, waves to FRANCIS who comes from hiding. HERMIT hobbles forward.

HERMIT [deprecatingly].
*Woe’s me—my son,
The Good Book saith—“Honour thy
father.”*

FRANCIS.
*Quote not, good brother,
Save thy precious breath.*

HERMIT.
*I quote—Another.
Dost remember One who said:
“Who is my father?”
He, my son,*

ACT II—SCENE I

*Shall dwell within the veil,
When thou and I have built Saint
Damian.*

*But see—the sun is high
I must away for bread.
God's blessing—dear my son
Upon thy head.*

[As old man hobbles off into forest with basket, FRANCIS sits musing. Then goes to work with trowel, birds singing above. Suddenly off-stage sounds of struggle, cries, growls. FRANCIS starts up, look of horror. Rushes off. Is visible for a moment, grappling with a huge wolf. Sounds continue; they disappear behind trees. Then FRANCIS returns, clothes torn and bloody, bearing old monk in his arms. Lays him tenderly on the stone-seat, supporting the white head.]

HERMIT [feverishly].

Ah, the wolf—the wolf!

FRANCIS [bending over him].

*Thank God—not badly hurt,
Only a flesh-wound—see.
Let me get cloths to stay the blood,
And wine——*

HERMIT.

*Nay—I am old,
It is my hour,
I die——*

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

FRANCIS.

Nay—little brother.

HERMIT [in a faint voice].

*And I go content,
For thou hast promised me,
Thou wilt not fail?
Thou wilt rebuild
San Damiano——?
Ah—thou wilt—I know.*

FRANCIS [despairingly].

But, brother—thou wilt live.

HERMIT.

*Live—but not here.
Ah, the wolf——
Men, too, an-hungered—kill.
If I could call the wolf!
My voice is weak—and low.
Call thou, dear Francis,
Call—and he—may hear.*

FRANCIS.

Dear Brother——

HERMIT.

*There is no hate
That love cannot subdue,
Call to the wolf——
Call—‘Brother’——*

FRANCIS.

*Dear Saint,
’Twould naught avail.*

ACT II—SCENE I

HERMIT.

*Love conquers all things,
Call——*

FRANCIS.

*Ho—Brother Wolf,
In love's name—come!*

HERMIT [very faintly].

Tell him—he is—forgiven.

FRANCIS [calling].

In love's name—Brother Wolf!

[Black wolf comes shrinkingly
from under the trees, cowers at
the feet of the dying HERMIT,
who reaches out, laying his hand
on the wolf's head.

HERMIT.

*Brother Wolf,
We—pardon thee—
Companion to my good son, thou shalt
be.*

*He will rebuild Saint Damian,
The task is sacred—sacred——*

[Starting up].

Before I leave thee—swear.

FRANCIS [on his knees beside him].

*By Christ's torn heart,
I swear——*

HERMIT [falling back].

*Peace be with thee,
Peace—peace,
Farewell——*

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

[The Wolf at his feet, the dead
HERMIT at his side, FRANCIS
kneels there, face lifted, hands
clasped.

FRANCIS.

*To what strange ports
The winds of God do blow
Man's little ship,
And why——
But God doth know.*

[Birds begin singing in the oak-
branches.

CURTAIN

SCENE II.

The Square of Assisi.

Square in gala attire for the Festival of the Holy Cross. Silken banners hang from the palace. Flags and streamers wave everywhere. Populace watching from the windows, the balcony, the bridge, all about fountain. All eyes eagerly fixed on the street-vista. Hands full of bright ribbons and flowers. Church-door open wide, bells pealing. Typical Italian scene. Just at sun-down. As curtain rises, bells stop pealing, sound of distant chanting is heard. Approaching nearer. Watchers peering and crowding. Between the dark walls comes a gleaming procession of banners and crosses, surmounting the white garments of the

ACT II—SCENE II

marchers. Tossing, glittering surge of colour. First the choir-boys, with baskets of flowers, strewing the pavements as they sing. Two by two. Acolytes following, swinging their censers. Then the priests, a great crucifix under a canopy. UCOLINO, the Bishop, white-haired, in violet robes and mitre. The Host in its golden monstrance, under a gorgeous *baldachino*. Chanting rolls sonorously down the narrow way. People, wild with excitement, wave their ribbons, fling out their flowers. At sight of the Bishop, fall on their knees for his blessing. Procession winds on into the church, crowd follows. Square is deserted. From within, for a few moments, chanting continues. Exquisite 13th century *Stabat Mater*. Throughout this scene light grows gradually dimmer. Sunset is past, twilight has come. Voices still heard very softly.

Down the stair-street steals a strange figure. A BEGGAR. Pale, haggard, clothes in tatters. Stands entranced for a moment, hearing the voices. Listens alone on the church-steps till all dies away. Glance moves from the balcony of the palace to the tavern, from the shop to the fountain. Stands head bowed, seeming to ponder. As voices cease, starts suddenly. GUIDO comes out of shop, begins to close shutters. BEGGAR hesitates, then slowly approaches.

GUIDO [putting the stuffs inside].

Beggar, away——!

The church-porch yonder

Is the place for thee.

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

[Just as BEGGAR recoils, starts to speak, PICA comes out ready for mass, calling back to her husband within.

PICA.

Bernadone——

Ah, Bernadone, hurry,

Come with me,

Thy shop accounts will wait.

BERNADONE [gruffly from within].

Always thy tongue wags: "Late, too late, too late!"

The church to thee is heaven,

Whose door might shut thee out.

Thou art too holy, woman,

Too damnably devout!

PICA.

Good Bernadone——

BERNADONE.

Thy son,

He with his silly lies,

Thou with thy prayer——

"Adored by all the world!"

I'm proud——

Proud of you both—I swear.

[PICA turns away with expostulating hands, crossing herself. Runs against BEGGAR. Reeling back, she is caught in his arms.

PICA.

Madonna mia!

ACT II—SCENE II

BEGGAR.

Mother——

PICA.

Francesco—thou!

[Half swooning, frantic with joy,
embracing the BEGGAR, arms
about his neck.

*Where hast thou been so long?
I have been sad, ah, wondrous sad,
But now——
How couldst thou leave me,
I who love thee so?
So pale thou art,
So strange—and oh, in beggar's
rags!
But thou art come again
From far away——
Ah, dear Francesco,
Tell me—thou wilt stay?*

BERNADONE [still from within].

*There, I'll collect that bill
Before another day.
They'll cheat great Bernadone,
Will they—hey?*

PICA [frightened].

*Thy father!
God be with thee,
Hide thy face——*

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

BERNADONE [coming out].

What—feeing beggars!

*Must the market-place be strewn with
money?*

*Art another one to waste my fortune,
Like thy beggar son?*

[Sudden start, pointing.

What—is that he,

That creature——?

FRANCIS.

Father——

BERNADONE [in fury].

Dost thou dare to flaunt thy madness

In Assisi's Square

For all the world to see?

Back to thy husks!

[As his son tries vainly to speak.

Come not again, thou fool,

To taunt me with thy shame!

I would forget thy face,

Thy very name——

[With violent gesture, thrusting FRANCIS aside, he drags the weeping PICA with him up the church-steps, under the curtain. PICA stumbling, gazing beseechingly over her shoulder. Both disappear within. FRANCIS left alone, covers his face. Faint from fasting and shock, starts to retreat up the stair-street. Suddenly swarm of children come

ACT II—SCENE II

whooping, racing headlong down,
spy the BEGGAR. Surround him,
pelt him. Yell mockingly, snatch-
ing up flowers from pavement,
long floating ribbons. Entwine
him, hurling their flower missiles.
Dance shrieking about.

Madman—Madman——

Madman—ah——

[Unrecognized by his former play-
mates, FRANCIS, broken-hearted,
tries to escape. They jeer at him,
pitiless.

Ha-ha—ha-ha——

[All at once door of palace opens,
CLARE runs out. Frail, slim,
courageous, leaps to the rescue.
Forefingers crossed, Italian fash-
ion. Pointing, advancing swiftly,
brows drawn. Children gaze
terrified.

CHILDREN.

The evil eye—the evil eye!

[Scampering off in all directions.

CLARE.

Ah, poor man, thou art faint.

Come, lean on me.

Rest here—I'll bring thee food.

God pity thee!

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

[As the BEGGAR sinks down on the
doorstep, she disappears within,
returning with wine and bread.
Seeing his weakness, she feeds
him.

*Children of Assisi,
Angels one moment,
Fiends the next——
It would have vexed kind Signore
Francis.
When he was here they were not so,
They feared to grieve him.
That was long ago.
Art stronger——*

[As the BEGGAR sips wine from the
cup as she holds it, she starts
back suddenly, meeting his gaze.
Cup falls to the ground shattered.

Nay——

FRANCIS [passionately].
*Nay——'tis not Francis,
'Tis a beggar only,
Friendless and homeless,
One who wanders lonely
From door to door,
Seeking for something lost
Through wind and rain
Ah—I am friendless,
Friendless——
Life is vain.*

ACT II—SCENE II

CLARE [deeply moved by his haggard look, impulsively, timidly, her small hand on his].

*But there is one friend left thee,
There is—God.*

FRANCIS.

God——

*I thought I had found God,
Thought I was serving Him,
But He too has forsaken me!
The light so dim,
I cannot see His face.
What then shall I do,
Since God is gone?
Ah, God—my God,
Thou too——*

[Buries his face in his hands. Within the church, sound of chanting rises softly. Outside, dusk and still. Larger shadow on doorstep motionless, small shadow hovering pitiful, protecting, like a little fluttering bird. Old watchman, with lighted torch, comes out of alley. Two shadows shrink back in the doorway. All at once the rose-window of church is lighted like a jewel. Watchman hobbles away. As he vanishes sound of gay music in distance, laughter coming nearer.]

CLARE [listening].

The Troubadours!

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

FRANCIS.

*Care-free, heart-free—they sing!
They have forgotten——
To think I was their king,
The lord of love they called me.*

CLARE.

*Now thou dost seek the Lord of Love
indeed,
The merciful—the meek.*

FRANCIS [starting up as voices, dancing foot-steps already begin to swoop down the stair-street].

*Madonna—haste!
They must not see thee here!
Swift—for they come——*

CLARE [reluctant].

And coming—need I fear?

FRANCIS.

Ah, tarry not, Madonna!

CLARE [yielding].

Go—I must!
[softly].

*God is thy refuge,
Though He slay thee,
Trust——*

[As CLARE goes toward church,
Troubadour-band rushes into
Square. ZITA dancing, whirling
with crashing tambourine, leads.
Quick eye notes the form on
church-steps. She stands arms

ACT II—SCENE II

akimbo, insolent air, loud mocking laugh. Notes the BEGGAR, draws nearer. GUIDO, who has recognized FRANCIS, goes about wringing his hands in frantic helplessness.

ZITA.

*H-m—Lady Clara feeds a beggar
To save her lily soul!
The lovely little Lady Clara,
High heaven is her goal!*

[Strikes tambourine, whirls mockingly before BEGGAR.]

*Dark is the soul of the Romany,
The more need it be shriven,
So—for the soul of the Romany,
May you sweet alms be given!*

[Trips gayly about from one to the other, coins pour into tambourine. As Troubadours strike strings, ANGELO sings Vidal's 'Love and France' to the shadowy crouching figure.]

RUFFINO [mocking].

*Go bring him to the feast,
Let him be crowned,
In memory of Francis,
Our lost king——*

ANGELO.

Shame—let him be!

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

ELIAS [sarcastically].

Nay, rather bring—

(I speak with wisdom)

Rather bring his lordship to the fountain,

Fling him in!

Ha-ha—ho-ho—a chase,

The swiftest win!

[As BEGGAR tries vainly to elude his tormentors, a ray of light falls on his face. ZITA, dancing toward him, lets tambourine fall with a crash. Coins scattered. She leaps to his side.]

ZITA [trills of laughter].

'Tis Francis—he is found!

The play is done——

Ah, what a rare disguise!

Come, thou shalt be again our king,

Come, lord of love—arise,

On to the revels!

And from this night shall cease

All tears and sighs.

FRANCIS [trying to hush her].

I pray thee, sister,

Leave me here in peace.

ZITA.

Sister—he calls me,

Sister——

He is mad!

ACT II—SCENE II

FRANCIS.

All women are my sisters.

ELIAS [mocking].

*Art brother to old Magda,
She who lies in yonder lazar-house
With sightless eyes?*

FRANCIS.

Brother—to her.

ZITA.

*How good thou'rt grown—thou hypocrite!
Thou shouldst teach benighted souls
like ours.*

RUFFINO.

He should preach——

ELIAS.

*Toss him to yonder pulpit,
Hap he'll tell——
Wilt thou not—'brother'
How to 'scape black hell?*

[Loud laughter as former associates seize him, spurred on by the jealous, furious ZITA. Struggle, crowd appears. All join in riot.]

ANGELO.

*Shame—let him go, I pray,
He does no ill.*

ELIAS.

Into the pulpit with him!
[Turning to populace].
What is your will?

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

CROWD [loudly jeering].

Toss him, the beggar—toss him!

Teach him fear——

[The BEGGAR, flung bodily into the quaint little outdoor pulpit, stands there panting, dishevelled, confronting the throng. Old watchman with torch comes running. All at once church-curtain lifts, singing is heard. Festival procession begins to wind out. All bear lighted candles. Choir-boys, acolytes, priests, two by two. Sharp contrast. Pomp and dignity of the Church on the one side; unruly, riotous Troubadours on the other. Above all the BEGGAR, pale as death, silent, eyes strangely glowing, in rags. From under the portico strides the Bishop, stern, white-haired, under the canopy. Aghast at scene disclosed. Torches flicker about him. Holds up white, slender, accusing hand. Silence. BERNADONE, PICA, in crowd behind, petrified. CLARE gazes at FRANCIS trembling. GUIDO wringing his hands, MAID beside him. Bishop beckons the watchman.]

BISHOP.

Who are these rioters

What do they here?

[Before he can answer, ZITA leaps forward revengeful.]

ACT II—SCENE II

ZITA.

*Most holy father—'tis not we!
Yon sacrilegious beggar,
Yon heretic,
'Twas he—'twas he!
We chid him for his blasphemy,
Is it not so, my comrades?
Was he not always first,
Was he not leader in all ribaldry?*
[Murmur from throng.
*What cared he for the holy sacrifice,
That with loud mockery
He set us all aflame
With righteous anger?
His, oh most holy father,
His—the blame.*

BISHOP [turning toward the BEGGAR, whose face is hidden under his cowl].

Who is the man?

ZITA.

*Speak, harlequin,
Unmask!*

[As FRANCIS lifts his head, face haggard, the cowl drops to his shoulders.

Behold!

Whose son is this——

[As all eyes turn toward the pulpit, riveted on the BEGGAR, BERNADONE, apoplectic with rage, shakes off PICA's restraining hand.

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

BERNADONE.

*Not mine—no son of mine!
He is a plague,
A wound that will not heal,
A curse——*

[Shaking his fist at the slim, silent figure.]

*Throw him in chains,
Give him the lash, the dungeon
Ay—and worse.*

BISHOP [sternly].

*Peace—peace,
Beware.
Always the curse returns.
Who builds the fire,
In the fire burns.*

[Turning toward FRANCIS.]

*Francesco Bernadone,
Thou hast heard what thine accusers
say.
Thy right by law
To have the final word.
Speak then——*

PICA [starting forward].

*Oh, speak, my son,
Let love cast out all fear.
Speak as though none,
None but the Lord of Love
Were nigh to hear.*

ACT II—SCENE II

FRANCIS [slowly].

He——

He and thou,

*About my heart entwine two golden
names,*

Sweet love-words both,

His burning name,

And thine——

BERNADONE.

What of the gold I gave thee?

BISHOP [motioning with his hand for
silence].

Peace

[Strange scene in the Square. To the right the festal procession still winding half up the stair-street. Long candles flickering, vestments, banners, halted so suddenly. To the left the gaping populace. Grouped about fountain the Troubadour-band and the gypsy. White-haired Bishop poised on the steps. All eyes fixed on the pulpit, the BEGGAR. Ragged, magnetic. Motionless figure.]

FRANCIS [throwing his head back suddenly, stretches his arms toward the hostile crowd].

What of the gold of Pietro Bernadone?

*Moneys hard-won, I've spent in
wantonness.*

If by my spending, he might elbow in

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

*And sit among the rich,
He was content.
I gave it to the poor,
And it was sin.
This cloak is all I have,
Bought with his gold,
I give it him and welcome,
It is old——*

[Flinging the cloak off, drops it over the pulpit edge at the feet of BERNADONE who hesitates. Crowd laughing. He looks toward son as if to speak angrily. FRANCIS stands in the brown hermit's garb, eyes glowing, arms still uplifted.]

*From this day forth I have no father,
Save the heavenly One,
To whom we all must pray for pardon.*

[As BERNADONE skulks off, gazing after him.]

*Yet should my brother need me,
Let him call——
And I will offer him my heart,
My hands,
My all.*

[Strange, tense moment, all eyes fixed upon him.]

*How shall we know each other?
How make clear*

ACT II—SCENE II

*To minds of men
What souls alone can hear?*

*I am the man I am,
Because my guide from childhood
Was my mother.
Hand in hand,
When white narcissi bloomed,
And all the land
Was sweet with winds of Spring,
We roamed together.
By her high window, late,
We've heard the singing water,
Watched the blue of vast still heaven,
And when stars shone through,
We've wished——*

*Oft when I pled she told
Of ladies fair,
Of armoured knights and bold.
The cavalcades swept by
With lance and spear a gleam.
I longed to seek the grail like Gala-
had,
Ah—haunting dream.
She conned the mighty feats of
Charlemagne,
Sang songs of Old Provence,
Told how by misty fires
The gypsies dance.*

'Twas fairie——

In a trance my childhood waned.

*My youth, alas—they know
Who've shared its wasted hours.*

Naught have I else to give

But years of penitence,

And though I live

A thousand years

And give not joy,

Vain, vain—my tears.

[As the words burst from him in a flow like a torrent, a curious change comes over the crowd. First careless, mocking, hostile. Then caught by the spell; still, stirred, vanquished. All at once several children running from alley, look up, crying out, hushed by the women.]

CHILDREN.

'Tis Francis—our dear Francis!

Oh, Francis—let us come——

WOMEN.

Sh-sh-h——

FRANCIS [gazing wistfully toward the children].

*Then came the call to war against
Perugia.*

One and all went forth to battle,

*For loved Assisi many a brave one
fell.*

ACT II—SCENE II

*That year within their dungeons,
Need I tell——
Thou, friend, wast there,
And thou—and thou—and thou.
You loved me then.
As I sang,
Danced for you,
Told tales of old romance,
Those grey walls rang,
And you forgot your sorrow.
At last—the pardon,
And as gaunt and ill,
We climbed again
The dear remembered hill of home,
Our loved ones came to greet us,
Laughed and wept.*

[Sounds of weeping are heard, all
follow him breathlessly.]

*Assisi was as one that day,
Assisi slept in peace
That night——*

[Murmurings from the crowd.]

*Then fever—long, long months,
And for her helpless son,
My mother fought with death.
Love fought with death,
And at the last,
Love won——*

[Pausing suddenly, eyes full of a
strange, mystic fire.]

*Love always wins.
And when I saw once more
The trembling grey of olive-leaves,
The blue wide sky,
The fields,
The river's sheen,
Heard the larks singing
In the windy morn,
Joy came to me again,
Joy newly born,
Joy inarticulate.*

*Strange wistful joy
That led me past the city
To the lowly huts where lie
The ones who cry: 'Unclean, unclean!'
And only wait
To die——
I shuddered at the sight
And turned away,
And joy was gone.
I looked across the valley to the town,
The early light made all the windows
flame,
But I was desolate.*

*Then riding gayly came a knight,
In shining mail,
His steed bedight in crimson.
Ere his tale of battles fought,*

ACT II—SCENE II

*And others to be won,
Under the Cross of Red,
Was fairly done,
I longed to follow——
But the hollow eyes of lepers haunted
me,
The tears and sighs of those in sorrow,*

[Deathly pale, stretching his arms
toward them all, with a smile that
rends their hearts.

*Then—on a golden day I heard
The words of life.
‘Take neither gold nor silver,
Shoon nor stave,
Give ‘all——’
I knew the way at last,
I gave—I gave——
My love had been a candle in a place
Roofed, hedged about,
To light one fading face.*

*My love has grown to be
The sun——
Impartial,
Fadeless,
Boon of bond and free,
Of prince and peasant,
Beggarmen and clown,
The idiot,
The leper,*

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

*Bird and beast and tree,
All—all my brothers are,
All kin to me.*

[With a gesture that thrills, a voice
that vibrates, echoing through the
tense stillness.

*I love and would be loved.
Ah—to be worthy,
To be brave,
Willing to suffer,
And through suffering to cry:
“Oh, God—I love thee!”
And to sing:
“I am Love’s Troubadour!”
With twanging string.
“I am God’s juggler!”
Merry bells I ring
Below your windows early,
That waking you may sigh:
“’Tis only little Francis,
The poor man—passing by!”*

[At the last whispered word, thrust-
ing hands before him.

*Hands, toil,
Heart, love,
Lips, pray,
Soul—little lark of God,
Sing, sing alway——*

ACT II—SCENE II

[FRANCIS leaps from the pulpit to the steps of the portico, lifting his hands out toward the BISHOP. Slim in his close brown habit, face transfigured.

*Ah, father—holy father,
May I hope
To reach the shining goal
Toward which I grope?
May it be won,
O father?*

[As he faces the throng with that radiant look, all with an irresistible impulse drop to their knees, hiding their faces. The old BISHOP greatly moved—

Son—my son!

[Flinging his arms around the BEGGAR he covers him with his violet robe.

CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE I

The Hermitage

Time is June, several years later. Day of Francis' departure from his Little Brothers, with the Crusaders for Egypt to war against the Saracens. Forenoon. Wind blowing. The ruined hut is rebuilt. Fire in the open. BROTHER MASSEO tends steaming pot. In a shadowy vine-covered nook BROTHER PACIFICO writes with a great quill, oblivious to all. BROTHER JUNIPER is mending sandals. BROTHER LAZARUS binds heather to staves, making rude brooms. BROTHER ELIAS brings faggots, throws them by fire and goes back to the forest. BROTHER RUFFINO, on his knees, scrubs the stone floor of the porch before the hut. BROTHER ANGELO picks his guitar lightly. BROTHER LEO is mending canvas.

BRO. MASSEO.

*Three times that mad wind's
Put my fire out——
I've chosen the wrong craft,
I was not born to cook.*

ACT III—SCENE I

BRO. JUNIPER.

*With that, dear Masseo,
We'll all agree.
We need but glance
Into each other's faces
For the proof.
Old Brother Wolf himself
Is not more gaunt.*

BRO. MASSEO.

*Ha——
Thou of all men,
Thou—to taunt the cook!
Hast thou forgotten then
That awful day
When thou wast cook,
Or cook so-called,
And broiled the fowls
With entrails, feathers, all?*

BRO. JUNIPER.

*And Francis said:
“In sooth it is a marriage feast,
A feast so rare——”
And surely Francis is a truthful man.*

BRO. RUFFINO [laughing].

*Ah, Juniper,
I'll not forget that day.
Thou leaping pot to pot,
To stir,
And baste,*

*Red as a parboiled lobster
All the while.*

BRO. MASSEO [turning, ladle in hand, mopping his brow]

*Do ye recall the speech he made,
This same wise Juniper,
Serving the nasty mess?
“These fowls,” said he,
“Are nourishment for brain,
Refreshment for the body
Is this stew!”*

BRO. RUFFINO.

*And surely in the land of Rome
There was no pig so famished
That could eat of it.*

BRO. MASSEO [with mock severity].

*Now wilt thou taunt me
When my fire fails?*

BRO. JUNIPER.

*And when I begged forgiveness
For the prank,
Our Francis said:
“Forgive thee, Juniper,
Thou little storm-tossed tree?
Forgive——
I would I had a forest
Full of little trees
Like thee——”*

ACT III—SCENE I

BRO. LAZARUS [trying a newly finished broom].

*Here come the two new converts,
Tescio and Gregorio.*

BRO. LEO.

*Two clouds upon the sun,
I like them not.*

[Enter New Converts, hands palm
to palm.]

Peace, Brothers——

NEW CONVERTS [sadly].

Peace——

BRO. RUFFINO.

*You have been walking
In the windy weather?*

BRO. TESCIO.

*Ay, walking, lost in thought,
We noted not what weather 'twas,
Though foul or fair,
We mused upon the Rule.*

BRO. GREGORIO.

The Rule's the thing!

BRO. LEO.

Love is the Rule of Francis.

BRO. TESCIO.

Love under Law is well.

BRO. GREGORIO.

The Law——

The Law's the thing.

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

BRO. LEO.

*God's law is love,
And love is liberty.*

BRO. TESCIO.

And license often.

BRO. GREGORIO.

Often license—true!

BRO. LEO.

*Why then is Francis loved,
But that he sees
In all men
Worthiness,
Owns nothing,
And in poverty is rich?*

BRO. TESCIO.

*What of the future of the Order then,
When as must some day be
The founder dies?*

[STERN BROTHER ELIAS has entered
with wood again and stands un-
noticed, listening.]

BRO. LEO.

God grant the day be far!

[MASSEO, in removing the steaming
pot from the fire, lets it fall,
again putting the fire out. Much
merriment among the Brothers.
New Converts shaking their
heads deprecatingly, go.]

ACT III—SCENE I

JUNIPER.

*Most nobly planned, Cook Masseo,
That little ruse of thine!*

RUFFINO.

*Methinks I hear them now,
Discoursing mournfully
Upon thy wastefulness,
Thy carelessness,
Thy vanity.*

LEO.

*Surely the voice they heard
Was not the Voice
That called us from the world!*

ELIAS [advancing toward the fire, tossing
faggots by it].

*Yet there is truth
In what they say.*

JUNIPER.

*Truth is not truth
That sets men sorrowing.*

ELIAS [turning to go].

*If we own not some biding place—
Have fields
And vineyards,
We shall cease to be,
Francis himself, a dream,
A shade,
A memory——*

[Exit.]

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

ANGELO.

*Alas, he voices
What sometimes I fear,
That Francis gone,
God will not seem so near.*

RUFFINO.

*I marvel much
How mortals such as we,
Wanton,
Impenitent,
Should suddenly
See with the eyes of Francis,
With him flee
Our golden beds
To couch with poverty.*

ANGELO.

*Strange though it be for us,
'Were stranger far
Thy Sister Clare,
Who might have won
The bravest knight
In all of Christendom,
Should lay aside her glory
Just to be
The servant of the poor.*

RUFFINO.

*I sometimes feel this life is too austere,
In our old home she was a sheltered
flower,*

ACT III—SCENE I.

*A lily frail and white,
And now to brave the storm,
The cold,
The night——*

LEO.

And is not God a shelter for us all?

PACIFICO [looking up from his writing
dreamily].

*Who can forget
The morning that she came,
She and her two companions,
To our door——*

LEO.

*And we were singing matins
As the three
Came through the cool, dim forest
Ardently.*

PACIFICO.

*Her eyes were like blue flowers
Wet with dew.*

MASSEO.

*A timid thing is Sister Clare,
Yet wondrous brave withal.*

PACIFICO.

*Ah, she was lovely
Kneeling
With bowed head,
Her hair a shining mantle,
Wind-spread about her shoulders.*

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

*And when 'twas shorn by Francis,
When it fell
Like golden, rippling water to her feet,
No spirit fain for heaven
Was e'er more wanly sweet.*

LEO.

*And when veiled and tremulous,
She wished us peace,
And with her gentle virgins
Bade farewell,
It was as though the gates
Had swung ajar
A fleeting moment
But to close again!*

JUNIPER [cheerily, seeing SISTER CLARE with
her two companions in wind-blown
cloaks at the top of the rock-path].

*Again the gates unfold,
Yonder she comes——*

[Brothers rise to greet the 'Poor
Ladies' who have heard of FRAN-
CIS' approaching departure.

SISTER CLARE.

Joy, Brothers—joy!

JUNIPER.

And joy to you—Poor Ladies!

CLARE [ardently].

And Francis—where is he?

ACT III—SCENE I

JUNIPER.

*A widow from Perugia came
At break o' day,
Her child was ill,
Her faith was very great,
She knew that Francis' touch
Would heal.*

CLARE.

And Francis went——?

JUNIPER.

*In truth he would not wait
To break bread with us even,
Snatching his cloak,
His staff,
Calling to Brother Wolf,
He went his way.*

CLARE.

*How like our Francis,
Brother of the winds!*

LAZARUS [in proud humility].

*Like Francis—ay,
Franciscan.*

CLARE.

*Went he not yesternight unto Assisi?
We thought 'twas he
Passed swiftly by St. Damian's
At dusk——*

LEO.

*To see his mother
And to say farewell.*

LAZARUS.

*But dared he cross the threshold
Of his home?
His father drove him thence.*

JUNIPER.

*Dost thou not know
His father—Bernadone
Is long dead?
Died in a fit of apoplectic rage
For that some customer
Refused to pay a bill.*

LAZARUS.

And Monna Pica dwells alone?

JUNIPER.

*Save for her servant, Guido,
Faithful soul——
Never was limping dog
More loyal to his own
Than that poor hunchback
To his master's house.*

CLARE.

*Madonna Pica spends her days in
alms,
Her nights in prayer.*

ANCELO.

*She loves the little chapel
On the hill.*

ACT III—SCENE I

CLARE.

*The Portiuncola——
I've seen her
By the little altar there,
Rapt——
Lost in ecstasy.
I've heard her sigh,
As to some listening angel:
"Adored by all the world,
My son—my son——"*

PACIFICO.

*With such a mother
Who could not be great?
[Writes again.]*

CLARE.

*Brother Pacifico,
What dost thou write?
Thy quill is never idle,
Often in the night
I see thy taper burning,
When by the narrow window of my
cell
I pass from prayer.*

PACIFICO [reluctantly].

I write——

CLARE.

I am a woman—pity me—and tell!

JUNIPER.

*Francis still calls Pacifico
"The king of verse."*

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

*I beg thee, Sister Clare,
Could aught be worse
Than that our every deed,
And misdeed too, alas,
Should be writ down
For men unborn to read?*

PACIFICO.

*We bear with Brother Juniper,
And when he jests we say:
"The lambs must frolic!"*

CLARE.

*Ah—but tell me, pray,
What dost thou write?*

PACIFICO.

*I call them "Fioretti—Little Flowers."
They are but humble stories
Of the hours
We've spent with Brother Francis.
How shall cold words
Create the living flame?*

CLARE.

The Little Flowers—of—Francis.

PACIFICO.

Dost like the name?

CLARE.

*Only a worthy follower
Of him whose feet
Are swift with joy
Could choose a name so sweet.*

ACT III—SCENE I

PACIFICO [eagerly].

*Come—let me show thee then
The finished tales
I've set down in a book,
A great brown book,
Illumed with gold and red.*

[Bowing SISTER CLARE and her companions into the hut, follows. Sounds of children's voices and laughter. Exit JUNIPER into forest. Enter FRANCIS surrounded by the children, BROTHER WOLF following. All come gayly down the steep path. FRANCIS seats himself on the rock, children about him.]

1ST CHILD.

*Let us go with thee,
Brother Francis—do!*

2ND CHILD.

*We'd fight the Saracens,
We'd be Crusaders too!*

3RD CHILD.

*I've made a lance,
It glistens in the sun!*

2ND CHILD.

*And I've a helmet,
It's a truly one!*

1ST CHILD.

*And thou shouldst see us march
With banners spread,*

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

*White—Brother Francis,
With a Cross of Red!*

4TH CHILD.

We'll miss thee, Brother Francis!

1ST CHILD.

*My father says
All Italy will miss thee!*

FRANCIS.

Ah, but the merry day when I return!

4TH CHILD.

Will't be long years?

FRANCIS.

*Years—nay,
Ye'll still be children
When I come again,
And I—I'll be the gayest child
Of all——*

1ST CHILD.

*Sing us the song
About the Golden Birds.*

FRANCIS.

There scarce is time.

ALL THE CHILDREN.

Ah—do——

FRANCIS [sings].

*I know a flight
Of golden birds
Attends me*

ACT III—SCENE I

*Everywhere I go,
The air is golden
With their wings,
Their songs
Like golden rivers flow.*

*My golden birds
Are golden prayers
That little children
Say for me,
They send them
From their hearts to God,
He knows my need
And sets them free.*

*And so I care not
What the road,
Nor how the winds
Of heaven blow,
I know a flight
Of golden birds
Attends me
Everywhere I go.*

VOICE [from the path beyond the wall calls].
Children—oh, children——

FRANCIS.
'Tis Brother Juniper.

JUNIPER.
*Oh, children,
Did ye know about the nests*

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

*That Brother Francis built?
Here in a little olive-tree,
Where standing tiptoe
Ye may barely see,
Are young doves
With their mouths spread wide
For food.
Come then,
But warily——*

CHILDREN [excitedly cry out].

1ST CHILD.

I feed the birds—I do!

2ND CHILD.

And so do I——

3RD CHILD.

I too——

[Chorus of all the children. JUNIPER stands finger to lips, as they all tiptoe up the steps to the path.

4TH CHILD [clinging to FRANCIS' hand].

*Dear Brother—come thou too
To see the baby doves.
Who teaches them to coo, I wonder,
And is it true
That what they say is “love,
Love-you—love-you,
Love-you——?”*

ACT III—SCENE I

[FRANCIS follows laughing. The New Converts have come from the wood again. They shake their heads solemnly as FRANCIS disappears among the leaves.]

TESCIO.

Such ribaldry!

GREGORIO.

Ay, truly so!

TESCIO.

Doth it become a man of God?

GREGORIO.

Become him—no!

[A fierce brigand with ear-rings, knife in belt, etc., appears at the head of the steps. Heads of two others peer furtively from the bushes. The Brigand glares down at the converts.]

TESCIO.

What would ye, knave?

GREGORIO.

What would ye—ay?

BRIGAND.

What would I—ha—what would I?

I would know who dareth

In so bold a tone

To greet Diavolo?

TESCIO [in poorly concealed terror].

Diavolo——

GREGORIO [weakly].

Diavolo——

DIABOLO.

Ay, fools,

Diavolo——

What would I—ask the dead

Who long ago

I've met on lonely roads

By night,

Go ask the dead—they know.

TESCIO [with forced bravado].

Thou son of Cain,

Away!

GREGORIO [in half whisper].

True—true—away!

DIABOLO.

Away——

Ha-ha—away!

Your puny wrath disturbeth me

Much less than when a gnat

Blunders against my forehead

Aimlessly.

TESCIO.

Beware my curse—I warn thee!

GREGORIO.

Ay—and mine!

DIABOLO.

Your curse,

Your warning——!

ACT III—SCENE I

*Hearken,
One before
Thought to exile Diavolo
From Francis' door.*

TESCIO.

This is God's House.

GREGORIO.

Ay—truly!

DIABOLO.

*Hear ye——
From the storm,
At last Nativity,
I turned for shelter.
Another rogue like thee,
Who wore good Francis' garb
Unworthily,
Called me a thief.*

TESCIO.

And so thou art!

GREGORIO.

Ay, ay—a thief!

DIABOLO [drawing his knife].

*As now—so then,
For Christ's sake I forbore——*

[Returns knife to sheath.]

*But then and there I swore
I would return another day
For vengeance.
I turned away into the blinding snow,*

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

*And hate was in my heart
Toward God and man.
When lo—I met a stranger,
By his side a wolf.
The stranger cried:
“Peace, Brother, Christ is born!”
Somehow the anger in me died,
And through the dark
I answered—“Christ is born!”*

TESCIO.

*’Twas sacrilege for lips like thine
To speak those hallowed words,
That Name divine!*

GREGORIO.

’Twas sacrilege indeed!

DIABOLO.

*Back to the hut
The stranger led me then,
And to the one—like thee, he said:
“Thou hypocrite,
Content,
Well-fed and warm,
On Christ’s birth-night
To drive into the storm
A stranger——”
Then this fellow said—like thee:
“The man’s a thief!”
And Francis murmured:*

ACT III—SCENE I

"To a thief the Master's parting words."

Those words are with me always.

TESCIO [angrily].

But still a thief!

GREGORIO.

A thief!

[Enter FRANCIS along the steep path, laughter of the children fainter. FRANCIS suddenly sees DIAVOLO, comes forward eagerly, arms outstretched.]

FRANCIS.

Diavolo——

DIAVOLO [falling to his knees].

Good Brother!

[Two Converts, holding up hands aghast, exeunt.]

FRANCIS.

Kneel not to me,

Arise——

Where hast thou been?

'Tis half a year ago

Since last we met—two strangers

In the snow.

DIAVOLO.

Where have I been?

I' truth where have I not?

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

FRANCIS.

*Remembered or forgotten,
I know thy livelihood was won
By honest means.*

DIABOLO.

I've won it as I could.

FRANCIS.

*By fair means, surely, not by foul,
Diavolo——*

DIABOLO.

*Well——partly yes, good sir,
And partly no.
'Tis as we see things, master.
Not I alone, thou too
Doth oft make poor men rich,
And rich men poor.
I strike the head, sir—I,
And thou the heart.
Thou art the worse,
For thou dost take their all,
I take but part.*

FRANCIS.

*Ah——Diavolo,
Thy heart's not hidden,
Though thy lips may play.*

DIABOLO [starting suddenly as he sees SISTER CLARE and her companions coming from hut].

*'Tis no fit place for me,
I must away——*

ACT III—SCENE I

FRANCIS.

Nay—tarry!

DIABOLO.

May luck go with thee!

We shall meet again.

[As he turns hurriedly into forest,
faces disappear. FRANCIS comes
down the steps. SISTER CLARE
goes swiftly toward him.]

CLARE.

Dear Francis——

FRANCIS.

Sister Clare——

CLARE.

Is't well thou go?

Thou who art refuge,

Shelter from the storm

To countless souls.

Is't well——

Leave Italy,

When hate and greed

Like wolves are at her throat?

FRANCIS.

Am I not Francis?

Who but I have won—through God

These hosts of followers,

Content to live in poverty,

*Content to go where God may call
them,*

Though it be to death?

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

*And I—the founder,
Dare I tarry here?*

CLARE.

*As always
Thou art right——*

FRANCIS.

*This very moment
To Assisi's Square,
From mountain and from vale,
The faithful throng.
At high noon they set forth,
And when the cavalcade
Climbs yonder hill with shout and cry,
Humbly—shall Francis follow.*

[Suddenly from the rocks, pointing
down the steep path].

*See—see,
Ah, what a sight!
'Tis Dominic—his donkey laden sore,
And Pietro bending low
Beneath a pack.*

CLARE [hastily].

*Dear Brother,
We shall return ere noon,
To speed thee on thy way——*

[CLARE and the SISTERS go. PIETRO
the tavern-keeper, appears at the
top of the steps. He is bowed
under the weight of many
bundles. Following him, leading

ACT III—SCENE I

a little ass, comes DOMINIC, the wine-vender. FRANCIS motions them to enter.

PIETRO [bowing low, obsequiously, dropping his bundles].

Good Master Francis!

FRANCIS.

Brother Francis—now.

PIETRO.

To me, still Master Francis.

Thou dost go and I mistake not,

In holy war against the Saracens?

FRANCIS.

Ay, Pietro——

PIETRO.

'Twill be a weary way——

And so—good master,

Begging thy pardon for the liberty,

I've brought——

My kitchen-fires blazed

Till very dawn——

I've brought thee——

Well, in short,

Good things to eat

And wine to cheer thee.

FRANCIS.

Ah, Pietro—Pietro,

Thou art kind.

[As PIETRO bows and bows, DOMINIC edges in front of him, holding the little ass by the bridle.

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

DOMINIC.

*Signore Francis,
Dost remember how,
When I was fain to follow thee,
Thou saidst:
"Nay, Dominic, thy duty is at home,
Caring for Antoinetta
And the two small girls,
Ginevra,
Filomela."
Now I know thy words were wisdom.
Since I may not go,
I've come to offer——
(Thou dost mind
The fresco on the wall
At San Ruffino's,
The Master riding on the Day of
Palms
Into Jerusalem?)
I've come to offer thee
This brown sure-footed friend.
She'll carry thee,
However steep the way
Or dark the night,
Unto thy journey's end.*

FRANCIS.

But, Dominic——

DOMINIC.

Accept my gift, I pray.

ACT III—SCENE I

FRANCIS.

*I thank thee, Dominic,
Each mile will be
A fair reminder
Of thy charity.*

[Chapel-bell begins to ring and the little Brown Brothers turn toward the sound. DOMINIC and PIETRO, after tethering the ass in the grove, follow others into the chapel. FRANCIS, alone, about to follow, when a slim figure, still wearing the gypsy garb, comes from the forest. Speeds toward him with hands clasped across her breast.

FRANCIS.

*It is not——
Surely it cannot be——*

ZITA.

*Yes, it is I.
Am I so changed—so old?*

FRANCIS.

I thought thee dead.

ZITA.

Dead—and forgotten?

FRANCIS.

*Nay, I have often—often thought of
thee,
And wondered where thy restless
spirit led.*

ZITA.

*Now thou dost go to lands
Beyond the sea?*

FRANCIS.

Even today.

ZITA.

*I vowed to hate thee—Francis,
In Assisi's Square
That awful night
I lied about thee,
Mocked thee.
Yet has Fate been strangely kind.
I can—no longer
Hate——*

FRANCIS.

Then art thou nearer God!

ZITA.

*I see Him not,
My love hath made me blind
To all save thee.*

FRANCIS.

*The greater Love will give thee back
Thy sight,
Thy soul shall see.*

ZITA.

*The soul——
The soul's a shadow.
I weary of the shadows.*

ACT III—SCENE I

*Let me know more than the shadows
When the night-winds blow.*

FRANCIS.

The soul's the Fadeless Shadow.

ZITA.

*Ah, but the winds, the crying winds,
The rain, cold with the breath of
winter,
And the snow——
And long long years
That bring the withered cheek,
The groping step
And slow.*

FRANCIS.

*The changing years
No longer hold in thrall
Those who like Sister Clare
Have given all.*

ZITA.

*Madonna Clare——
Why speak to me of her?
As well compare the dark with day.*

FRANCIS.

*Nay, ye are sisters,
Go to her—I pray.*

ZITA.

*Thinkest thou the noble Clare
Would let me rest——
A Magdalen
Upon her virgin breast?*

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

FRANCIS.

*Ah, go to her
For my sake——
Let me know you two together,
Sisters,
Ere I go.*

ZITA.

*In years to come, mayhap,
But oh, not now—not now.
[Faintly bugles sound.
The horns are sounding!*

FRANCIS.

The knights draw near!

ZITA.

*Ah, dear, dear Francis,
Should we meet no more,
Remember me as in the long ago
I danced before thee
In the smoky glow of gypsy fires.*

[The chapel doors swing open, the
Brothers come hurriedly from
mass.

Fare thee well——

[Cloaking herself she disappears in
the forest.

LEO.

*However long delayed,
The parting comes too soon.*

ACT III—SCENE I

[As all the Little Brothers gather about FRANCIS, the new converts come back from the forest. DOMINIC leads in the ass, followed by PIETRO who places his bundles in the paniers.]

FRANCIS.

*But let our parting
Be a merry thing.
This sad, hate-ridden world
Needs laughter,
Love
And song——*

*Yet he who loves
Must suffer for love's sake,
Who loves must lift the crosses.
I feel within my soul
The world's joy
And its pain——
Ah, Little Brothers,
Millions yet unborn
Must love each other more
That we have been——*

[Nearer and nearer the blare of the bugles. Children come trooping down the path; stop at the head of the steps, waving, looking off down the valley.]

CHILDREN.

They're coming—the Crusaders!

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

[As the children flock excitedly down the steps, FRANCIS' mother appears, her hand on the shoulder of the hunchback GUIDO. FRANCIS hastens to her.

FRANCIS.

*Mother—beloved,
Thou' st come this toilsome way?*

PICA.

To say farewell!

FRANCIS.

But, dear, I came to thee last night.

PICA.

I am thy mother——

[Bugles sound nearer, the Little Brothers come trooping up the steps. DOMINIC leads the ass, PIETRO, bowed with his load, following. The Wolf is close to FRANCIS' side. The bugles sound clearer.

FRANCIS [embracing his mother].

*Well I know
Thou wouldst not have me stay.
God guard thee,
Give thee peace,——*

[As GUIDO kisses his hand.

*Good Guido—be her son
Till I return.*

ACT III—SCENE I

[Again kissing his mother, FRANCIS hurries up the steps. Bugles sound below the hill. At the top of the steps he turns, lifts his hands in blessing and is gone. PICA sinks to the seat under the little arbour, GUIDO by her side. Enter from the forest CLARE and her two companions. As the bugles grow fainter, CLARE hurries to PICA.

CLARE.

Madonna——

PICA.

Sister—Clare!

CLARE.

*Thy son belongs to all men,
To the world——*

PICA.

*By all the world adored
Some day,
Some far off day——*

[Except for the group in the little green bower, the Hermitage seems deserted. Suddenly ZITA comes timidly from the forest, looks about, then runs up the steps. Stands with hand over her eyes, peering down over the valley where FRANCIS has gone. Bugles sound more and more faintly. She staggers as though fainting.

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

GUMDO [seeing her].

Sister Clare,

The gypsy——

Yonder——see——

[CLARE hastens up the steps. As the others gaze up toward the two, CLARE catches the slim figure in her arms. ZITA's dark head rests on her breast, the eyes closed. Touched by the gypsy's helplessness, CLARE stoops and kisses her forehead.]

CURTAIN

ACT IV

SCENE I.

A Forest Hut

Two years later, near Assisi. Storm of thunder, lightning and rain. As curtain lifts, LEO and DOMINIC are carrying FRANCIS in. They lay him on a rude pallet. Over him is a great dark crucifix, the form seen through the lightning flashes. LEO lights candle on a stand below crucifix.

LEO [casting aside his drenched cloak].

Well, well for us

We met thee, Dominic.

DOMINIC.

And well for me.

I'll stay until the morrow

An thou wilt?

LEO.

Much thanks—but nay,

*Thy little ones will need thee, Domi-
nic.*

DOMINIC [bending over FRANCIS who lies haggard and still].

He seems so pale—so still!

*Dost think
He'll soon revive?*

LEO.

*Truly——
'Tis very weariness.
From Palestine to Italy
We've trudged for many a day.*

DOMINIC.

*How many years
Since Francis went away?*

LEO.

Scarce two——

DOMINIC.

*Like twenty doth it seem.
I'll see you at the morn.*

LEO.

Best tarry till the storm be past.

DOMINIC.

I heed not storm.

LEO.

*Good night then, Dominic,
And peace be thine.*

DOMINIC.

And peace to thee.

[Exit DOMINIC. LEO goes to FRANCIS, covering him with blanket. FRANCIS starting from sleep, cries out wildly.]

ACT IV—SCENE I

FRANCIS.

*The Saracens have lost!
The Christians won!*

LEO.

Francis—awake!

FRANCIS [clutching LEO convulsively].

*Ah, but the dead——
Christian and Moslem,
Heart to heart they lie,
Closer than trampled flowers.
Dead—dead—and young!
It would not seem so pitiful
If they were old,
But oh, to see them fallen
White—and cold——
Their shining hair blood-drenched.*

[Lightning floods the room, thunder.

*I cannot bear it——
Let me flee!
Nay, I am bound,
Bound hand and foot!
Help—help——
But who will help?*

[As the lightning flashes again.

*What is yon gleaming thing?
A sword—a flaming sword,
St. Michael's sword it is!
Ah, help——*

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

*Help me, good Angel,
Rend the chains!*

[Face lifted in agony of supplication, hands clenched.

He hears——

St. Michael hears!

They loose—they fall—I'm free!

[Falls back trembling.

How desolate, how bleak,

The roads we go.

*Are there no paths like those in
Umbria?*

In Umbria the lark sings,

All the ways are cool,

Dim—dim and cool——

And sweet with blossomings.

*The winds forever whisper in the
leaves*

In Umbria——

LEO.

Ah, hear me—Francis!

FRANCIS [glaring at LEO].

Grey guide, I fear thee,

Though I know not why.

I thought thee demon first,

Then angel——

But now thou seemest both.

If both—thou art my brother,

Thou art—Man!

[Laughs, then sadly.

ACT IV—SCENE I

*Strange how I see
When all the world is dark,
Yet walk with shadows
When the world is light.*

[Distant thunder, rain against the window.]

LEO.

*Francis—awake,
Thou'rt dreaming!*

FRANCIS.

*Forbid me not,
I prove the Word—I——*

LEO.

*Awake—awake!
'Tis Leo calleth thee.*

FRANCIS.

*Leo—not Leo,
Not the one I called
“The little lamb of God”?
And hast thou come so far,
To lead me home?*

LEO.

*Home——
We are home, Francesco.
Beyond the valley
Dear Assisi lies.*

FRANCIS.

*Beyond the valley—ah!
Beyond the valley——*

*I remember now.
The narrow valley
That I may not cross.
They must not know that I am here.
I had thy word,
Thou didst not tell?
Ah—but the dream——*

LEO.

'Twas but a dream, Francesco.

FRANCIS.

*Assisi must not know,
Must never know——
My mother—Leo,
Didst thou see her there?*

LEO.

*She passed but saw me not.
She went to prayer,
Poor Guido following.*

FRANCIS.

Seemed she much older, Leo?

LEO.

Nay——

FRANCIS.

*If she should see me as I am,
Her heart would break.*

LEO.

*'Twill break with longing
If she see thee not.*

ACT IV—SCENE I

FRANCIS.

*And didst thou pass that palace
By the road——
“House of the Brothers”
Writ above the door?*

LEO.

The house of the Franciscans?

FRANCIS.

*The Little Poor Men’s palace
Rather say——
Our blessed Master
Had not where to lay his head,
Yet they who vowed
To follow Him in poverty
Since I have gone
Have grown to be land-owners.
Woe is me——
Franciscans rich,
Franciscans money-changers,
Titled Franciscans
Of their learning proud!*

LEO.

*Not all approve, dear Francis,
But a few.*

FRANCIS.

*Our Lord’s companions,
Were they rich or schooled?
Poor fishermen they were,
Tent-makers,
Men unknown.*

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

LEO.

*Try to be patient,
All will yet be well.*

FRANCIS.

*I have been patient, Leo,
Thou knowest that I have.
But ah—my Star!
The Star that others saw and loved,
The Star that led
Our care-free wanderings.
Love's Star it was——
And it has vanishèd.*

LEO.

*Hidden by clouds,
Always the clouds blow by.*

FRANCIS.

*And so, alas—the days
That were and are no more.
How rich then was our poverty,
How sure our trust,
Trudging the rough roads all the day,
Grey with the wayside dust.
At evenfall some dark pool
Of waters cool and clean,
And a bed o' boughs
In the still nights
Under a roof of green.*

LEO.

Days to remember always.

ACT IV—SCENE I

FRANCIS.

*Ah, Leo—Leo—Leo——
Remember them we must,
Singing God's little love-songs
At doorways for a crust,
Following, following—following
The Lady Poverty,
By uplands,
With the bright blown grass
Like waves upon a sea,
But upland, lowland,
All the way
Was mirth and mystery.*

LEO.

*I marvel still
How earthly days could be
As those days were.*

FRANCIS.

*Ah, Love was master then,
Love made the blind man see,
The lame man walk,
The leper clean,
Now—but a memory.*

LEO.

*In three and thirty years
Our Master had one day of victory,
And after that——*

FRANCIS.

*Betrayal,
Agony——*

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

*Far better hadst thou let me die
In Palestine.
The lake He loved,
The lonely roads He knew,
The garden where He prayed,
The hill——*

[Wind and rain loud outside].

*Oh, listen—Leo,
Listen to the rain,
The wild blown rain.
Homeless it is as He was.
Let me go wander with it,
'Twill pity when I say,
I too am homeless,
I too
Have lost the way.*

LEO.

Nay, Francis—it is night.

FRANCIS.

*Night, Leo——
Night is kind.
Day having light withholdeth,
Night is blind.*

LEO.

*Despair not, Brother,
Thou shalt see again,
Have friends——*

ACT IV—SCENE I

FRANCIS.

*Friends were my wine,
Companionship my bread,
I thirst,
I famish,
Lone—uncomforted——*

LEO.

*Ah, might thy friends but know
Thou art again in Italy!*

FRANCIS.

*I—nay—my phantom.
Say not this is he
Who called all creatures ‘brother.’*

LEO.

*Would I’d the wit
To make thee understand!*

FRANCIS.

*When I was far away in Palestine,
And when they said in whispers,
Aping sorrow,
“He is dead,
Francis, the Little Poor Man
Is no more!”——
The words they said
Were wiser than they knew.*

LEO.

*But ah—thy friends,
Let me recall but one,
An humble fellow, Dominic,
But none more truly thine.*

THE LITTLE POOR MAN.

FRANCIS.

*Dominic——
Who would have followed
But I bade him stay?
Poor little Dominic,
Who brought the ass
That day I——*

LEO.

*Ay- little Dominic.
He met us on the way—this very night,
He helped me bear thee here,
He is scarce gone.*

FRANCIS.

*Ah, that reminds me
Of a dream I had——
Last night, methinks,
Or was 't the night before?
In truth it seems
That in these latter times
Mine only friends are they
Who come in dreams.
Well—in the dream I saw
A little happy man,
A woman and two children by his side.
“Who art thou, little happy man, pray
tell?”
And he replied:
“Francesco Bernadone!”
“Nay,” I cried, “not Francis—I am
he!”*

ACT IV—SCENE I

*Then with a wily smile he said:
"Thou art Francesco as he is,
I as he might have been."
"And who are these?"
And then the three, calling my name,
Embraced me hungrily.
But even as they spoke,
Thy voice called,
I awoke——*

LEO.

A foolish vision, truly.

FRANCIS.

*And yet,
I might have been like Dominic,
Anchored,
Content,
With wife and children.
I made my hearth too wide,
I meant to be husband and father
To Humanity——
And now——*

[Faintly outside, above sounds of
wind and rain, a voice calls.

Who comes?

LEO.

*Some pilgrim, seeking shelter
From the storm.*

[As he opens the door GUIDO enters
eagerly, breathless, drenched.
FRANCIS is lying in the shadow.

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

GUIDO.

*Master, dear Master——
Where is my master,
Surely he is here?*

LEO.

How didst thou know?

GUIDO.

*Tonight I saw thee passing in the
Square,
And oh, I knew thou wouldst not come
Without my master
Back from Palestine.*

LEO.

Madonna Pica——

GUIDO.

*I said no word to her,
But when she slept,
I tiptoed out.
I told the Brothers at the Hermitage,
They come——
Lame as I am,
I far outstripped them all.
Where is my master——ah——*

[Sees FRANCIS, limps swiftly to him, falls on his knees, kissing his master's hands passionately.]

FRANCIS.

Peace to thee—Guido!

ACT IV—SCENE I

GUIDO.

*Ah, gentle master, come,
Come home again——
Thy little room is even as the day
When thou didst leave us.
Morning and night
Thy mother kneels to pray
Beside thy bed.
Come, master——
It will give her youth again.
So many times she's said:
"When Francis comes!"
For her sake, master——*

FRANCIS.

*For her sake, Guido?
Ah, she scarce would know
In this poor ghost
The lad of long ago.*

GUIDO.

*Thou'lt always be to her
The little lad——*

FRANCIS.

*Would that I were
That little lad indeed,
For, oh, my soul is darkened,
And mine eyes see shadows only.*

GUIDO.

Shadows——thou?

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

FRANCIS.

*I walk in twilight, Guido,
All the blue world pales,
For me, alas,
No wings across the sky,
Upon the sea—no sails.*

GUIDO.

*But wings must weary, master,
Sails be furled,
Only to spread again.*

[Sudden thunderous knocking at the door. Before LEO can open it DIAVOLO the brigand enters, followed by his confederates, GUISEPPE and GAZZIO, dark, bearded, fierce little men.]

DIAVOLO [striding toward FRANCIS fiercely].

*Lurking without,
As is the brigand way,
I heard—and knew the voice,
I heard and laughed.
Thou—weak——
How can the weak make others strong,
The sick make others well?*

*To all but thee,
Diavolo's a thief,
To thee—a man.
Twice only have we met.
Seeds sown by thee
Grew in this black earth here,*

ACT IV—SCENE I

*The heart of me.
And now—I swear
To be thy follower.
Hearken, Guiseppe,
Rouse ye, Gazzio,
Have I not vowed?*

GUISEPPE.

Ay, master!

GAZZIO.

Ay, 'tis so!

DIABOLO.

*And have ye known
Your master break a vow?*

BOTH.

Nay, never—never—master!

DIABOLO.

*And he will not now.
Say, is Diavolo the sort of man,
To follow, think ye,
In a weakling's van?
Feel of these arms—they're iron,
These fists—they're lead.
Thy friends are mine,
Thy foes
Were better dead!
Diavolo is thine,
And with Diavolo
Thine is Guiseppe too
And Gazzio!*

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

[Even as the three brigands bow low before FRANCIS, the Little Brothers burst eagerly into the hut. There is a great hubbub of voices, greeting.

JUNIPER.

*Dost thou recall
How well I roast a fowl?
A marriage-feast, indeed,
I'll spread for thee,
And for thy mystic bride,
The Lady Poverty.*

FRANCIS.

Juniper—thou little clown of God!

PACIFICO.

And I——

FRANCIS.

*My king of verse!
And is thy theme still—after the years
Our golden dream of peace
And poverty?*

PACIFICO.

*Still—still the Little Flowers of Love
That blossom by their paths
Who follow thee.*

FRANCIS [groping].

*Angelo—my minstrel!
Thy guitar,
I've dreamed of it.*

ACT IV—SCENE I

ANGELO [springs to his side].

*And I dreamed of thy singing,
With thyself—so far.*

FRANCIS.

*Lazarus—do the hermit fires blaze
From thy great faggots
As in other days?*

LAZARUS.

*Still from the leafy solitudes I bear
Fuel for winter fires
And for prayer.*

FRANCIS.

Where are Tescio and Gregorio?

MASSEO.

*They've joined another Order,
They are gone,
No more to vex thee.*

FRANCIS.

Elias—where is he?

MASSEO.

*He too has sought
A worldlier brotherhood.*

FRANCIS.

*Ah, tell me—Brothers,
For you all do know,
What has befallen one I loved,
One who loved me,
The Wolf of Gubbio?*

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

MASSEO.

*Poor beast—he is long gone.
From mourning thee
He died.
We buried him one dawn
Upon the mountainside
That overlooks the valley
And the town.
He was a faithful one,
We missed him sore,
Still do the children ask for him,
Still do they wonder
That he comes no more.*

FRANCIS.

*Many the steep we've climbed
In wintry weather,
Good Brother Wolf and I——*

DIABOLO.

*You were together
That Nativity,
I met you in the snow,
Ah, I remember well!*

FRANCIS.

And I—Diavolo.

RUFFINO.

*Now, to Assisi,
Back to St. Damian's!*

FRANCIS.

*I long,
I long to go——*

ACT IV—SCENE I

*But oh—I—fear
The Bishop—has forsaken——*

RUFFINO.

*The Bishop Ugolino knows thee here.
He would have come,
But for the weight of years,
He bids thee come to him.*

FRANCIS.

He spake—of me?

RUFFINO.

*“Tell ye the Little Poor Man,”
So he said,
“His Bishop craves his blessing.”*

FRANCIS [incredulously].

The Bishop—craves—my blessing?

RUFFINO.

Even so.

FRANCIS [stands up, hands pressed together, undecided. Suddenly lifting his head, he calls].

Leo—my cloak—my staff——

[LEO brings the cloak, puts it about FRANCIS' shoulders, hands him the staff. FRANCIS suddenly turns toward the great gaunt crucifix, gazes at the thorn-crowned figure; then in a voice of marveling adoration.

Oh, strange—compelling—Master!

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

[All bow their heads. FRANCIS turns from the contemplation of the Saviour, then as though lost in thought.

Lead on——

LEO [blithely].

Who bears the torch?

LAZARUS [with humble eagerness].

I, Brother—I——

PACIFICO [throwing the low door wide to the moonlight].

Small need of torches now,

The storm is over,

Sister Moon's abroad.

[All the Little Brothers, DIAVOLO and his men, pass out into the blue night. GUIDO has lingered behind close to FRANCIS.

GUIDO.

As in the old times, master,

Lean on me——

[FRANCIS lays his arm on the hunchback, together they pass out.

JUNIPER [beyond the door calls].

Is this a time for silence?

PACIFICO [answering].

Nay—for song!

[Below the crucifix the candle, almost burned out, flickers. The

ACT IV—SCENE II

moonlight fills the little room.
Out in the rainy woods an ex-
ultant chorus sings, growing
gradually fainter and fainter.

CURTAIN

SCENE II

The Hermitage

Rebuilt now roughly in stone. End of chapel
visible under the trees, same tower with
little bells, ivy-twined. Early Spring,
just at dawn. Shadowy forms of Little
Brothers together under the grape-
arbour. Several emerge, conversing
together, toward the rock-seat.

PACIFICO [yawning].

Only the vigil of a night!
And I am heavy
From the lack of sleep.

ANGELO.

I too—alas!

RUFFINO [looking up the path].

The blessed Brother Francis,
He can keep Lent's forty days
In fasting and in prayer,
And then return,
Light-footed as the faun,
With eyes that burn.

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

LAZARUS.

*Say rather 'tis his soul that burns,
His mind.*

*His eyes—ah, pity—pity of it,
Francis—blind!*

[Silence for a moment, then he
continues with trembling voice.

*I was a leper, as you know,
He gave me sight.
God knows how gladly
I would take the dark again
To give him light.*

PACIFICO.

*Two boons alone—he craves,
To know Christ's joy,
And if he may,
To know the Master's pain.*

LAZARUS.

Ah, he has suffered—suffered.

PACIFICO [starting up].

I hear him coming—hark!

[All gaze up the rock-path, listen-
ing. A singing voice is heard,
coming nearer as the dawn
slowly lightens.

*Some strange new ecstasy is his,
The lark is in his voice.*

[FRANCIS is seen, coming down the
path slowly, led by LEO. With
eyes closed, face uplifted.

ACT IV—SCENE II

FRANCIS [eagerly].

*We must remember, Leo,
We are minstrels,
We must sing
Creator and Creation.
Is it dawn?
Surely it is the morning wind
That touches me——*

LEO [guiding him forward].

*Ay, Brother,
All the Eastern sky is grey,
The night is gone.*

[As FRANCIS sinks down on the rock-seat beside them the Brothers are silent. Occasional note of awakening birds in the branches.

FRANCIS [reverently].

*Altissimo, Omnipotente,
Buono Signore——*

[Sudden silence again, bird-notes die away.

*Angelo,
My Troubadour—art here?*

ANGELO.

Close by thy side, dear Brother.

FRANCIS.

*Hast thou forgotten
How to sound the strings*

*Like tinkling waters
When a comrade sings?*

ANGELO [fetching his lute].

*Nay, Brother Francis,
I remember well——*

FRANCIS.

*Ah, that is good.
First let me tell
How in the night with God,
I feared my sufferings had made
me——
(And I told Him so)
Forget to sing——
And then He gave
A little song to me.*

ANGELO.

*Ah, gracious gift of God,
A song——?*

FRANCIS.

A song about the sun!

[As the Brothers lean toward him eagerly, a soft rosy glow tips the far off hill-tops, one after the other, as candles lighted for mass. FRANCIS' face, unconsciously turned toward it, shows wistful adoration. His blind eyes gazing as if into vacancy, he begins to speak softly, half chanting.

*“Praised be my Lord God,
With all his creatures,*

ACT IV—SCENE II

*And specially our brother the Sun,
Who brings us the day,
Who brings us the light,
Through whom Thou givest us
Light—in the darkness——”*

[Faltering suddenly, his voice breaking. As the Brothers gather closer FRANCIS thrusts his hands to his eyes.

ANGELO.

Brother—what ails thee?

PACIFICO.

Thou art not ill?

FRANCIS [still hiding his eyes].

*Nay, dearly loved—but leave me—
With the dawn——*

[As the Brothers pass quietly into the hut, turning lovingly toward FRANCIS as each disappears, FRANCIS' hands are pressed to his bowed face.

FRANCIS [rising gropingly].

*It cannot be,
It is a vision—only!*

[Shades his eyes with his hand, trembling.

'Tis—memory——

[He goes unsteadily to back of stage, the rock-wall, tree-shaded. Beyond the sweep of May-time

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

Italy, the towers of Assisi in the distance, slowly reddening. Staggering, his hand to his brow, he gazes off suddenly.

Nay—nay—'t is true!
The green dear trees,
The town—upon the hill,
The sky——
It is no dream!
I see again, I see
Light after—darkness——

[Falling to his knees in ecstasy, hands clasped, forehead against the wall. MONNA PICA and GUIDO come up the path, PICA hurries toward him.]

PICA.

Francesco—child!

FRANCIS [leaping to his feet].

Oh, Mother mine,
I see——
I see thy face again,
Not with my groping hands
But with mine eyes——

PICA.

Thy sight—can it be true?

FRANCIS.

I've seen the dawn,
And Italy at May
And thee——

ACT IV—SCENE II

PICA.

*Oh, wondrous day
That gives thee light again!*

GUIDO.

Oh, wondrous, wondrous day!

PICA.

Came it with swiftness, son?

FRANCIS.

*Even as though God spake,
The darkness fled.*

PICA.

Are we the first to know?

FRANCIS.

*Only we three
Of all the wide world, Mother.*

GUIDO.

*I must go
On winged feet
To tell the Brothers so.*

[He hobbles off gayly to the hut.

FRANCIS and his mother seek the bower. He, sitting on the step below her, gazing into her face. GUIDO's voice is heard excitedly telling the news. Like brown bees the Brothers swarm from the hut, all eagerness. With exclamations of wonder they flock about FRANCIS.

LEO.

What miracle is this?

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

FRANCIS.

*One sunbeam puts to flight
A host of shadows, Brothers.*

JUNIPER.

*Would I were Chanticleer,
Then from yon ivied wall
With flapping wings
How lustily I'd crow.
I'd call the world to witness
What we see.*

PACIFICO.

*This is the morn
The children climb the hills
To deck the shrine of Mary
With white flowers.*

MASSEO.

*Not only they,
But all Assisi too,
The silent forest
Will be loud with song.*

PACIFICO.

*And when they know,
What think ye they will do?*

ANGELO.

Go mad with very gladness.

DIABOLO [who has been striding about excitedly, suddenly sees a movement among the brambles, parts them; then in fierce elation to his two followers.

ACT IV—SCENE II

*Guiseppe, up!
Up—Gazzio!
There's news,
And it is morn!*

[To JUNIPER.
*If I were Gabriel
And blew my horn
Into their very ears
The hounds would sleep.*

[Kicking at the brambles with his
great sandaled foot.

*Up—up, I say,
There's news!*

[Little grizzled men rise from the
thicket, rubbing their eyes.

GUISEPPE.

News, sayest thou—news?

GAZZIO.

What news?

GUIDO.

*News——
News o' God!*

*Deep in the greenwood,
In the lonely night,
He heard my master praying.
Not for himself——
He prayed for other men,
And as he prayed——*

GUISEPPE.

Ay, as he prayed?

GAZZIO.

*As Brother Francis prayed,
What then?*

GUIDO.

*God touched his holden eyes,
And lo——*

BOTH BRIGANDS.

He sees——?

GUIDO.

*He sees again—he sees!
Oh, wondrous day!
But hush——*

[All the Brothers have gathered about FRANCIS, who is still sitting below his mother, gazing up at her eagerly.]

FRANCIS.

*Now I must leave the hill-tops,
I must go
Where toiling men are.
Ah—Humanity——*

[He pauses, face lifted, a look of ineffable love.]

*Marred, shamed, bereft,
From out the lonely deeps
Men call to me,
Their souls like white birds*

ACT IV—SCENE II

*In a mesh,
A-flutter to be free.
Lost in the storm,
The homeward way
Is hard to see.
The tempest over,
Passion's house a wreck,
Desire lulled,
They come——
Sick children wanting rest,
They come to me.*

*Their passioned eyes implore,
Their tense hands seem to pray,
They only long to find again
The one sure way.
And I who see their souls
Like angels shine,
Like flowers blooming from the dust,
Know them divine.
Divine——
And at the thought,
In deep humility
I bow me low.
Ah, can it be
That God
From out the deeps,
Comes thus—to me?*

[Silence. Occasional sound of a
bird-note in the trees.]

THE LITTLE POOR MAN

PICA.

Deep cries to deep.

PACIFICO.

*The Little Poor Man's heart
Would hide them all.*

[Enter SISTER CLARE and ZITA.
GUIDO hobbles excitedly toward them.]

GUIDO.

*Pardon, Poor Ladies,
What surprise
Would cheer you most?*

CLARE.

What—surprise?

GUIDO.

*You'll find the answer
In my master's eyes!
But I must tell you on't,
Poor Ladies, an you please,
My master is——
My master, my—my master——
Sees——*

CLARE.

Thy master sees?

ZITA.

He sees——?

ACT IV—SCENE II

FRANCIS.

*Sister Clare,
God's peace be with thee.*

[To ZITA].

And with thee——

CLARE.

And thou dost see again!

FRANCIS.

*He gave me sight,
But oh, He gave a song,
Even as blind I sang it
At the dawn,
The glory came——*

CLARE.

The glory of the seeing!

PACIFICO.

*And the song!
"The Canticle," he calls it, "of the
Sun"
'Twill live forever.*

FRANCIS.

*Would I might voice it
In the golden tongue the angel knew,
As in the windy night he sang.
Was I awake—I know not,
But I heard——*

[As he is silent, all awaiting, the
birds cry faintly in the trees.

*What saith the dial?
Soon—surely he will come,
The Bishop Ugolino
And the rest?*

PACIFICO.

*They must be even now
Below the hill.*

FRANCIS.

*Ah, if the hermit of St. Damian could
see
The fruit of all his prayers,
How glad he'd be!*

[Strange, sweet, unearthly music
sounds.]

*Hark——
Hear ye not
A strange, wild melody?
A haunting, hungering voice it seems,
Do ye not hear it?*

PICA.

Only the children singing at their play.

FRANCIS.

*Nay, listen, Mother—listen,
It smiles through tears——
Its beauty is like pain.
Dost thou not hear it, Mother,
Like April winds,
Like rain——*

ACT IV—SCENE II

[All silent, listening to a sound like
a violin, passionate, ravishing,
ghostly, now near, now far away.]

*It is the old Voice,
Bidding me to go,
To follow——
Where it wills——
Ah——
My spirit like a caged bird
Beats the bars
With wings that want the sky.
Who art thou,
Hidden minstrel?*

[As he speaks the music keeps on
wistfully.]

*Can it be
Thou art my Sister Death,
Far flown——
From heaven's hills
To set me free?
I will rename thee, Sister,
Thou art she
Whom I have longed for,
Loved,
The Lady—Poverty.*

[Music changes to notes of rapturous
greeting as of long parted
friends.]

*I am—a poor man—Lady,
I have not anything*

THE LITTLE POOR MAN.

*But a cloak——
A staff——
A lute——
And a little song to sing.*

[Music sounds dreamily.

*I am a Troubadour,
Of love—I sing——*

[His words grow fainter.

*For love—is all,
All—All——
Is—love——*

[As his head falls against his mother's breast, his arms sink limply with outstretched palms, the music ends. All stand silent, awe-stricken. Suddenly an elfin troop of children trips down the steps, their arms heaped with white narcissi.

CHILDREN.

We've flowers for our Francis!

[Several of the Brothers lift their hands to still the children.

LEO.

*Hush,
He sleeps——*

PICA.

*Forbid them not,
He loved the children.*

ACT IV—SCENE II

CHILDREN.

He'll see them when he wakes!

[They come swiftly, lightly, laying the white flowers at his feet. As they scamper away, slowly the BISHOP enters, bowed with age. Villagers follow. They crowd about with hushed wonder. The BISHOP totters forward, bows over the radiant form. As all fall to their knees, he turns to FRANCIS' mother.

BISHOP.

*Thy prayers are answered,
This, thy son—shall be adored
By all the world——*

[Then with outstretched arms and face lifted.

Saint Francis—of—Assisi——

[PICA lifts her head, as though suddenly conscious of the marvel of her motherhood; then it sinks again; her lips resting against her son's dark hair. The sunlight, flickering tremulously through the leaves, blowing in the Spring wind, casts a greer and golden light. The birds break into rapturous song.

CURTAIN

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The little poor man ("Il
poverello")



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